



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

ACVA • NUMBER 045 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, April 23, 2015



Chair

Mr. Royal Galipeau

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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•(0845)

[*English*]

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

Good morning.

[*Translation*]

Welcome, everyone.

[*English*]

This morning I welcome you to meeting number 45 of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

[*Translation*]

Today, we are finishing our study on the continuum of transition services.

[*English*]

During the first half of the meeting we will have the pleasure of hearing from Don Ludlow and Tim Patriquin, Treble Victor Group's president and past president; as well as Phil Ralph, national program director, and David MacDonald, from Wounded Warriors Canada.

[*Translation*]

And during our second hour, we will hear from Guy Parent, Veterans Ombudsman.

[*English*]

Please note that this meeting will conclude with a 15-minute discussion regarding the request from the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to have our committee study clause 1 from Bill C-597, an act to amend the Holidays Act.

[*Translation*]

Okay, we're ready.

[*English*]

I'd like to draw attention to my vice-chair Peter Stoffer and this fancy pin that his colleague is—

Okay, is this for me?

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): I have one for each of you, sir.

The Chair: Including your chair.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Yes, sir, including the chair.

The Chair: There is a chance I might even recognize you first, under these circumstances.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I would only be honoured, sir.

The Chair: Of Don Ludlow, Tim Patriquin, Phil Ralph, and David MacDonald, who is first?

Mr. Ludlow, you have the floor.

Mr. Don Ludlow (President, Treble Victor Group): Thank you very much.

The Chair: You have at least that section of the floor.

Mr. Don Ludlow: Great. Thank you, Mr. Chair, committee members, and all those joining us here today.

It is a pleasure for my colleague Tim Patriquin and I to be here representing the members of the Treble Victor Group and participating in this important discussion.

The Treble Victor Group, or 3V, is a network of ex-military leaders working in business, government, and the not-for-profit sectors, who support one another in their post-service careers. We assist one another through mentoring and advice, networking, and speaking events, while consulting with corporations and other organizations to establish programs for those transitioning from the military. While not representing ill or injured soldiers specifically, we simply note that our organization comprises some 250 former military leaders with many different backgrounds and experiences, all at different stages in their careers.

We recognize that all veterans transition out of the military at some point. Many, if not most, seek engaging and meaningful careers post service. Our members believe that when considering a national approach to veterans, a great country like Canada needs to ensure the following: that we honour our heroes who have served in times of war and peace; that we look after our ill and injured soldiers, seeing them through recovery, rehabilitation, and a return to fulfilling work; and that we tap the amazing talent that the nation has developed in its military services. Our organization is particularly interested and experienced in the latter point as it seeks to collaborate with businesses and organizations throughout Canada to leverage the skills, capabilities, and experiences of those with military backgrounds.

Why is it imperative to tap the talent available from transitioning veterans? First of all, Canada has invested heavily in developing and building the skills and capabilities of these citizens who are drawn from all regions of the country and all walks of life. Second, many of the strengths developed through military service are highly sought after in the business community, often-referred-to soft skills such as leadership, managing diversity, initiative, and the ability to deal with ambiguity and rapid change. Finally, evolving demographic, economic, and competitive demands require us to mobilize all talent available in the population to address looming labour and talent shortages.

With this in mind, we would like to share with you a number of insights that 3V members have gained from their own transition experiences. The first is that transition takes time. Our own experience would suggest that a well-planned and executed transition from the military can take at least two years and often much longer. The implications of this are clear. If veterans, injured or otherwise, do not spend time and effort preparing for their post-military career while still in uniform or while convalescing, a last minute move will likely not prove successful for them or their new employer.

Second, our experience with transitions has demonstrated that there is almost always a brief conversion or ramping up to a particular industry or job. Thus jobs that have a training and development component at the outset, whether some of the excellent generalist programs run by some corporations or, for example, sales roles that have common courses for all new hires, seem to be well suited to transitioning veterans and result in considerable success for all.

Finally, we have learned that a successful transition of military personnel often requires an active sponsor or a highly supportive organization. Although Canada's military is highly regarded by Canadians and business leaders, the transferability and relevance of military experience is not so well understood. Too often, someone with military experience, while perhaps interesting and impressive in person, may seem like a hiring risk in comparison to and in competition with candidates who have done a particular civilian job before.

However, success breeds success. Once given a chance, our veterans usually perform remarkably well and are quickly integrated into new organizations, teams, and ways of doing things. Not surprisingly, organizations that have had some successful hires begin to employ many more veterans, and ex-military recruitment programs become a meaningful part of their talent sourcing.

Nonetheless, veterans require sponsors and someone willing to give them a chance. The reality is that there are just not enough of these champions in the business community today. All of this is to say that while many business leaders and hiring managers are sympathetic to those with military backgrounds and regard them well, there are some barriers preventing successful transitions. We wish to underscore that despite such challenges, veterans are not looking for sympathy. They are simply looking for meaningful employment to launch their post-service careers.

What can be done to help improve the situation for our veterans and enable Canada to make better use of those with military backgrounds?

Our organization has three recommendations. First, transition needs to begin well in advance of release or completion of rehabilitation. Transitioning veterans must be encouraged to consider and be provided resources to support their post-military employment plans a number of years before hanging up their uniforms. Transition support needs to be much more than resume writing and pension briefings, and should be structured to provide both resources and time for education upgrading or skills development.

● (0850)

Second, a particular emphasis needs to be placed on the educational aspects of veteran transition. Veterans should be provided with sufficient funding to pursue post-secondary education or training during, or on completion of, their terms of service and efforts to grant equivalency certifications based on military service and qualifications should be accelerated. A veteran will certainly appear to be much less of a risk if they, at the very least, have similar education and qualifications to others competing for civilian jobs.

Finally, we believe that clear goals should be set and formal partnerships established with corporate Canada. The highly successful 100,000 jobs mission south of our border demonstrates what can be accomplished when a specific goal is set and when corporations understand how supporting veteran transitions can benefit their own businesses. We note that Canada Company, closer to home, has established a goal of 10,000 jobs for veterans and this is achievable with appropriate support from the business community. Once common goals are committed to, we believe there is an opportunity to establish structured apprenticeship, on-boarding, or ramp-up programs with businesses across Canada to support transitioning veterans funded in part through relevant grants or tax incentives.

In closing, we do not believe that veterans want either charity or special treatment, but rather they seek the opportunity to use the skills and experiences they acquired in the armed forces as a springboard to a post-military career. We ask that you consider ways to support veterans well in advance of their transition date, while working with Canadian businesses to establish specific programs to convert qualified veterans to successful members of their organizations. Doing all of this properly is important to our veterans who will continue to enjoy meaningful work, while contributing to the continued success and vibrancy of Canadian society.

We very much thank you for the opportunity to present to you today and look forward to questions and further discussion.

● (0855)

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

We now go to Mr. Ralph.

Mr. Phil Ralph (National Program Director, Wounded Warriors Canada): Mr. Chair, and members of the committee, on behalf of Wounded Warriors Canada it's our pleasure to appear once again before this committee and to be part of the very important discussion on the continuum of transition services for our ill and injured Canadian Armed Forces members.

By way of introduction, my name is Phil Ralph, and I serve as the national program director of Wounded Warriors Canada. I also serve, and have for the last quarter century, as the padre of 32 Combat Engineer Regiment in the Canadian Forces. I'm pleased to be joined today by David MacDonald, Wounded Warriors Canada's national partnerships director, a still-serving reservist with the Royal Regiment of Canada.

To briefly introduce you to our organization, Wounded Warriors Canada is a non-profit organization that helps Canadian Armed Forces members, be they regular force, reservists, or retired, who have been wounded or injured in their service to Canada. Through a wide range of national programs and services we help find solutions where gaps have left our veterans and their families in need. Currently our primary focus is on mental health and particularly the staggering impact of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Overall, our mandate is to help any veteran in need as they transition to civilian life.

At Wounded Warriors Canada, we work every day with Canadian Armed Forces members who are awaiting medical release and those who have been released and have subsequently made the transition to Veterans Affairs Canada. The realities of medical release are extremely daunting. For starters, their military careers are coming to an abrupt end and at a minimum they are now faced with a very challenging transformation in their professional lives.

While SISIP aids financially in the transition, it's merely temporary financial support. What's more, individuals who are medically releasing are injured and often remark that the experience in moving from the Department of National Defence to Veterans Affairs Canada has not been seamless. It is encouraging to hear the Minister of National Defence and Veterans Affairs minister recognize and speak openly about the needs for improvement in this important area.

As I am sure you have heard from previous testimony at this committee, from a program and service delivery standpoint there are gaps that exist in supporting transitioning ill and injured Canadian Armed Forces members. It's through the identification of these gaps that Wounded Warriors Canada works diligently to ensure that the hard-earned funds of our donors are allocated to best make a difference.

To provide just a few examples of our programming this year, we will fund the recently launched COPE program, which stands for Couples Overcoming PTSD Everyday; the Ontario provision of the veterans transition program; innovative PTSD animal-assisted therapy through our partnership with Can Praxis, the nation's leading couples-based PTSD equine therapy program; our Tribute to Your Service events to address the gap that exists in supporting family members that stand beside and behind our Canadian Armed Forces members each and every day; VETS Canada to help move

our homeless veterans from the streets or shelters into affordable housing; and we are in year two of a 10-year, \$400,000, Wounded Warriors Canada doctoral scholarship in veterans mental health research in partnership with the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research.

Our spectrum of care, as we like to call it, is targeted toward ensuring that our returning veterans suffering from a range of personal, health, and financial issues are supported as they transition to civilian life.

Recently we have identified a critical gap that exists in terms of support available to family members who live in environments where, for example, PTSD and operational stress injuries are present in the home. That is why our organization is taking a family-centric approach to operational stress injuries. We are seeing tremendous outcomes as a result.

Notwithstanding the gaps that exist, as mentioned, it is extremely important to note that there are effective resources within both departments to assist our transitioning Canadian Forces members and veterans. Our organization works in conjunction with those who provide care to Canadian Forces members including health services, operational stress injury social support or ACIUS, unit chaplains, casualty support management, and military family services, among other resources.

All in all we seek to encourage members to avail themselves of the programs and services that are provided within DND and VAC, and those that exist independently through funding support organizations like Wounded Warriors Canada.

It is also important to note that since our foundation, we have paid particular attention to the well-being of our primary reservists. Anyone affected with operational stress injuries face a number of obstacles and challenges on their road to recovery and their transition to civilian life. That said, within the Canadian Forces, these challenges are particularly daunting for members of the primary reserve.

● (0900)

The often unspoken reality is that for members of the primary reserve, whom Canadian Forces leadership have spoken of as being essential to their ability to accomplish their mission in Afghanistan, return home with little support requisite to manage the transition to civilian life.

Those who have provided 30% of the effective deployed forces return to a civilian society ill-equipped to appreciate, recognize, or deal with their needs. Further, should they seek access to programs that are in place, they often feel abandoned due to the realities of time and space coupled with the pressures of trying to provide for themselves and their families as they have transitioned back to class A service.

In summary, we consider ourselves to be a grassroots charity, interacting, listening, and responding as best we can to the needs of the men and women who bravely serve our country. From day-to-day interaction with our veterans and their families, we would be remiss if we did not offer some practical suggestions as to where the CF can work more effectively to address the needs that exist. For example, we need to eliminate long administrative delays for the receipt of awards and compensation. SISIP needs to be broader in its coverage definitions, particularly in the area of education, both in terms of programs offered and duration covered. We need to improve retraining and resources available to support workplace transition for those being medically released. Finally, the shift from the pension system to a lump sum payment as part of the new veterans charter is commonly brought to our attention as a policy position requiring review.

In closing, we thank the committee for the invitation. We remain at your disposal should you have further questions now or at any time moving forward. As a closing remark, I just want to note that we have available copies of our annual report for the committee members, which they can take with them. They can see an overview of all the activities that Wounded Warriors Canada engages in.

Thank you.

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

Now it's your turn, Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

To all of you, thank you very much for coming today. On behalf of all of us, thank you for the tremendous work that you do in helping the heroes of our country, but just as importantly their families as well.

In my dealings with certain veterans—it may be a shortfall or just fundamental ignorance on everyone's part in this regard—when an individual with PTSD goes into a private sector job, that company or that small firm is unaware of what triggers the PTSD in certain cases. Many times the individual... I am dealing with one fellow now in Nova Scotia who unfortunately lost his private job because they couldn't deal with him. They didn't know how to deal with it. When I spoke to the manager, he said, "Well, we had no training or awareness of how to deal with veterans with OSI or PTSD."

I would like some assistance or guidance from either one of you in this regard. How do we get the information out to the private sector and those jobs out there that these veterans are coming in...? We tell them they are heroes and team leaders. They are successful, focused, and everything else, but they have OSI or PTSD. They'll hire them, but then unfortunately it doesn't work out for them, and the guy feels like a failure again. He is out of the military. He couldn't get a private job. Now what does he do? He feels kind of hurt by himself, and he feels he let himself and his family down.

What advice or guidance can you give us in this regard in order to help the private sector, and the medical sector as well? Many doctors in the regular system don't necessarily like dealing with men and women of the service with post-traumatic stress because the forms are complicated and long, and it's quite backlogged. I just need some advice from you on how we can go forward on these issues.

Again, thank you very much for the great work that all of you do.

Mr. David Macdonald (National Partnerships Director, Wounded Warriors Canada): Thank you very much.

Yes, I can understand your question quite well. Coming from a personal point, I was diagnosed with PTSD in 2013 due to injuries I sustained overseas. I have been in that position where I've been in a corporate job where they didn't quite understand what was going on. For a veteran who's going through an OSI or PTSD and ends up losing his private sector job that he fought so hard to get, that's obviously a devastating blow.

Despite all of the documentation and all the work and all the knowledge we have surrounding PTSD, we are miles away from truly understanding what's going on in that person's head. There is a general level of ignorance—this is the best way I can say it—in society to truly understand. The stigma surrounding PTSD is...and I've been talking to groups about this. They always say the same thing. I put the exact case of what happened to me up on a PowerPoint presentation without actually revealing who I am, and I always get the same thing. They say, "Oh he's going to be suicidal. He has addiction. He's going to be angry", and all those things: depression, abandonment issues. I don't have any of those. I don't suffer from any of those issues or anything like that. I was suicidal at one point in my life due to my PTSD, but I don't have addiction. I'm not depressed or anything like that.

It centres around the stigma of what we think PTSD is. The start of trying to solve that issue would be a general education platform for corporations and employers to understand that when they hire a member who might have PTSD, it's as simple as.... I was lucky enough when I moved into my corporate job with TD Bank. Right in the interview they asked the standard question, "Do you have anything that would prevent you from doing your job, or do you have any special needs that you require?" I was lucky enough to be okay with admitting this, and I flat out said, "Well, I have PTSD." Instantly I thought, "Oh, God", because I've actually lost jobs in the interview phase by admitting that. They had the best answer. They were like, "Okay. Do you need a dog? Do you have any special...?" I just said, "Well, I just maybe need the occasional break or two more than I would get in the day." They said, okay, no problem. They made note of that, and it went to HR and it was disseminated down.

But was there any formal education program in that bag? No. Maybe HR could have supplied something to them to explain that if you have someone who has PTSD...just a simple education document on what PTSD is, because a lot of employers don't understand what it is. They think of it as a mental illness, and unfortunately, there are still a lot of people out there who think that this guy is going to snap one day and possibly go on a shooting rampage in the office. It's not that at all. Unfortunately, the media has portrayed it that way, as we see too often on TV. That's not the case.

I think it starts with communication and an education program.

● (0905)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Opitz.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you, in full disclosure to my colleagues, I'm a member of Treble Victor. Phil Ralph and I may or may not have had adventures in the past, and David and I share a regiment in common.

David, you anticipated and answered a question that I was about to ask on PTSD. I was also going to shift it to the Treble Victor guys, because it's that perception of what it is. You're right, sometimes because of the media, because of movies and dramas and things like that, people internalize and think that's what it means and that's what's going to happen in their workplace, which is not the case, as you very well articulated just now.

But what do we do in the corporate world to explain that? How do we educate employers? Because I think as employers and civil society, we do need to look after our veterans. There's prosperity in Canada because we have great businesses and a great economy, but a lot of that depends on security. They're interdependent.

How do we educate our employers? Maybe I'll start with the Treble Victor guys on this.

Mr. Tim Patriquin (Past-President, Treble Victor Group): Sure. Thank you very much.

I think there's a tendency in Canadian society and perhaps others to associate PTSD and veterans as synonymous. PTSD is actually a societal issue. In emergency services, if you're a paramedic, a fireman, a policeman, you can also get PTSD, as in other professions. I think it has to be not just something focused at veterans, but something that is a broader education program, and not just to corporate Canada as potential hirers of veterans but to the general public. I think it's something, as David mentioned, that's misunderstood.

How do we go about that? That's a good question.

• (0910)

Mr. Ted Opitz: You also mentioned making career and education part of this for soldiers. I know the minister has already talked about, for example, transitioning, right from the time somebody signs up and joins the military to the point that they're actually releasing, and an education program right from the start in terms of building the foundation and already looking ahead to release. I'm just looking at the military.com site in the U.S., which is not a bad one. I'm just looking at a thing saying: getting your degree, making education decisions, getting the right degree, which school, how do you do it, those sorts of things.

Do you think we need to do a better job in having partnerships with post-secondary institutions to start developing those skills within soldiers as they go along? It's like the sales and marketing that you mentioned. You identify somebody who may have particular skills and a talent for that sort of thing and you maybe encourage them to develop those abilities throughout their service.

Do you have any thoughts on that? Is David weighing in as well, and Phil?

Mr. Tim Patriquin: I couldn't agree with you more. The Americans do it well. I believe the motto of one of their military academies is something like, we are training America's future

leaders. From the very beginning, a serviceman or servicewoman should already be thinking about their post-military career. I think that's where Veterans Affairs and the Minister of National Defence have to work much more closely. I know Minister O'Toole has expressed that desire to get into and meet the members of the Canadian Forces because each and every one of those is a future veteran. I think that's very important for us to be cognizant of.

Your idea, Mr. Opitz, to forge a stronger alliance with post-secondary organizations, I think, is incredible. It shouldn't just be universities and colleges. It should be places where you can get trades and other skills.

Mr. Ted Opitz: And equivalencies....

Mr. Tim Patriquin: Absolutely.

Mr. Ted Opitz: I'll go over to Padre Ralph for a second. You mentioned CIMVHR, and there are a lot of groups that do that kind of work. CIMVHR is of course part of 37 universities, but DRDC is doing work on identifying the markers within blood and the genome to see who is susceptible to stressors and that kind of thing, and there are other groups and organizations. Do you think we need to aggregate some of that better? Do you think people are working in silos on that? Or is there enough collaboration among those groups that maybe we should take some time to explore and perhaps encourage a better aggregate response?

Mr. Phil Ralph: An organization like ours that works on transition issues and grassroots support recognizes right away that there is a need for ongoing research. Research is not as sexy as the other programs that we do. It's much harder because it takes so much longer to see fruition and results from the results of that work. It's hard to get people excited about research. It's one of the big challenges and we knew that.

One of the reasons that we funded our 10-year commitment to CIMVHR was that we recognized that when the shift focuses away from active missions overseas and people begin to lose some of that corporate knowledge—and it's very easy to forget all those lessons—we need to be training the next generation of caregivers so that the next time Canada is in conflict, those lessons don't have to be relearned. As for sharing best practices, I know when CIMVHR has its forum, that's one of the things they do. They bring various researchers together to present and work together. The academic community is fairly good at sharing information, sometimes better than other communities.

Mr. Ted Opitz: I'm shifting to the Treble Victor guys. What do you think about working with Canada Company? I know you all do, and many are part of the same organizations as well. But on an organizational level, do we do enough among, say, Treble Victor, Canada Company—which, effectively, are captains of industry—TPL, and others, to aggregate the knowledge we have at this level?

Do you think we could do a better job on that?

Mr. Don Ludlow: VTAC has done a very good job of laying a baseline of knowledge and understanding of both the issues and the information out there that can help understand the challenges for transition. I think there's a lot more work to be done in terms of working with corporations, both big and small, in trying to develop specific programs to address those issues. Canada Company and TPL are creating some great ideas and attention for change, but there's a lot more work to be done, for sure.

● (0915)

Mr. Ted Opitz: David, on the reserve side—

Oh, sorry, I'm out of time. I have too many questions and not enough time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Opitz.

I'd like to give this admonition to all members of the committee. When you feel you've spoken for five minutes, keep an eye on the chair so that I could politely wind it down, and not one minute after you're finished with your time.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you, gentlemen, for appearing before us today.

You know, I'm a civilian. I have no military background whatsoever. I come from a community, Guelph, where for most of us the closest we get is watching the 11th Field Regiment leave the armoury and go out on exercises, and that was rare and very exciting for us.

I try to understand PTSD. I can't get close. I remember doing some international aid work, of which I do a lot. Back in 1999 I went into the jungles of Honduras for three weeks, worked with the poor, went looking for food, covered with flies, lived in very poor circumstances, came home, and I had trouble going back to work. That was just after three weeks that I had trouble going back to work. I couldn't even go into a grocery store, to Zehrs, and look around because I was overwhelmed with the choices we had. If that was my experience after three simple weeks, I cannot begin to imagine what it's like for people coming out of the forces, having faced far more perilous circumstances.

Having said that, I don't think we fully understand the impact of PTSD, and one or some of you have said that. Knowing that, I want to ask Mr. Ralph this question. You talked about providing support for families, and spouses particularly, in trying to help those families. You obviously know Jenny Migneault. I've talked to her on a number of occasions. She is a persistent person. She is passionate about trying to, I guess, make more robust our response to families in which someone suffers from PTSD.

She talked about having, for instance, weekends where they actually have retreats and can work with the spouses who can help those who are suffering with PTSD. You work with the spouses so that they know how to handle it, you take the pressure off the doctors, you take the pressure off VAC, and that kind of thing.

You guys seem to know what you're doing. With that in mind, can you tell us how the government could better help you? It's not fair, I think, to put it all on bureaucrats and on the government to

understand all of this. Why not contract out services to people like yourselves and Jenny who want to work?

Mr. Phil Ralph: Obviously, you're right. That's the piece we've identified. When we talked about our spectrum of care, obviously you start at one end with VETS Canada and getting people off the street, the veterans transition program, which is geared towards individuals, and some of our other support programs. Then you get to our newer programs. We have Tribute to Your Service events, which are geared for couples. You can't come by yourself. You have to bring your spouse so they can get together and learn lessons. Our couples program, COPE, is based on the best practices of the veterans transition program, and applying that to couples.

The assistance about which we have talked to both ministers is in terms of those who are still serving, and encouraging commanding officers to grant leave so they can take these programs, perhaps providing transportation assistance to get to the programs. We funded it. It's built. I guess to quote the *Field of Dreams* movie, we built it, now we need them to come.

Of course, one of the challenges as an independent charity is that we fully fund the programs and everything we do at no cost to veterans. It takes a lot of effort. This year we'll spend \$1.4 million in direct programming for veterans and their families. Unfortunately, some of that programming money goes into airline fuel, because it's a big country in which to get people from coast to coast. Therefore, assistance in getting people to programs would be the simplest place to start, I think, and a very practical place to start, and then move on from there.

I know we've had some discussions with the CMP on providing some transport to our COPE program. They're very interested in that, so we've had some very meaningful discussions with both departments on that issue. Yes, we can work together on these things.

● (0920)

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Working together I think is important, you and the ministry.

Mr. Ludlow talked about transitioning into the workforce. We've had Monster Canada before the committee. I know you're probably familiar with the program it has going on in the United States. It's skills translation, identifying the skills you spoke of that so many of our veterans have that are hidden, so to speak, and also, in an active sense, linking up with potential employers, not passively hoping that they'll come along and say they want to hire a veteran, but actually going out on a search. Are you familiar with the program at all? Would you encourage that kind of skills translation adaptation in our forces so that we could better identify those skills and link them up with employers?

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Mr. Don Ludlow: All right, then, quickly, I'm not overly familiar with the Monster program or how it might apply to folks in Canada, but for sure there could be a better opportunity to use technology to create job markets and forums virtually, given the dispersion of our veterans across Canada. Absolutely. Setting up mechanisms to get qualifications or equivalencies done for veterans is very important.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Do they exist now?

Mr. Don Ludlow: I think there are a few community colleges and some universities that certainly grant equivalencies. I think it's a little bumpy and—

Mr. Frank Valeriote: No, I mean skills translation. Does it exist now?

Mr. Don Ludlow: Not to the best of my knowledge, in a really formal sense. No.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: All right.

Mr. Tim Patriquin: I know there are some skills translation abilities on the Veterans Affairs website. I think it's important to note that a Canadian-made solution, which may not include translation but it does include job search, is being put together by Kijiji, which is Canadian. It's important to note that.

It's similar to Monster. They compete with each other. It would be nice to have a Canadian-made solution.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lizon, please.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you all for coming here this morning.

The first question I have is for Mr. Ludlow.

In your presentation you mentioned three recommendations. The first one was that the transition should begin early. What does “early” mean exactly?

There are people who enter the Canadian Armed Forces who move from a career in the corporate world or private business and enter the armed forces and are very successful. Why is it so difficult to go the other way? Where exactly should that transition begin? Should it begin at the very early stage of training? The person who starts the training initially as a soldier should realize that at some point he or she will leave the forces, whether as a result of his or her own decision, medical leave, or for whatever the reason might be.

Where exactly should that “early” start? Where should it be? Should it be part of the entire process? Should it be part of the process starting at a certain point? Where?

Mr. Don Ludlow: Absolutely. In an ideal world, anyone joining the armed forces would be thinking long term. At a certain point I'm going to retire. I either retire with a pension, stop working, and do volunteer work, or I do a second and possibly third career—the earlier, the better.

As we've said, our own experience is that it takes a couple of years to do a successful transition. For the people we have seen who've ended up in really fulfilling work that they enjoy and stay with, it takes a couple of years to do that. Why?

If you spend a lot of time in the military, you may not even be aware of the options you have when you leave. Do you want to work in a forestry company or financial services, or do you want to be an entrepreneur? It takes a while to figure out all the options out there and what is really attractive to you. Once you've started to do that, how do you set yourself up for success? You can't really do it the last

day you hang up your uniform, saying, I'm going to start a company tomorrow. I suppose you could, but it's likely not going to be as successful as if you had put in better preparation, time, and effort, and maybe even education, skills upgrading, and training.

Our advice to people we encounter who are in uniform but are looking at getting out even in a couple of years is that this is not too soon to start thinking about that and setting yourself up for success. You'd say the same thing for someone in the civilian world. If somebody was in banking, or if someone was a lawyer and wanted to get into the business world, that's hard to do overnight. You need some time to actually transition from one industry, sector, or job to another. It's the same for vets.

● (0925)

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: My question is to both. You mentioned the people you encounter. How do you actually get your people? Do they come to you? How do you find them?

Mr. Don Ludlow: Great question.

We're slowly opening up chapters across Canada. People usually approach us, but we certainly bump into people in our work and in our own network activities.

We're a pretty small group. We're only a couple of hundred people, but we try as best we can to mentor and coach them and help them along. We usually try to connect them with somebody. If we know they're interested in being a lawyer or in financial services, then we try to connect them with one of our members who's in that just to give them a bit of guidance and help along the way.

Mr. Phil Ralph: In our experience, Wounded Warriors Canada has become recognized throughout the country for the programs that exist. Veterans are able to find us pretty easily because we're very active in what we talked about, new technology. Facebook, social media, and our website, etc., have exploded in the last couple of years in getting the message out. That has been leveraged by some excellent corporate partners who have been doing some great national media awareness for us, most recently in a couple of campaigns by The Brick and some other things—online games like World of Tanks, and a whole bunch of other stuff that's out there.

It's a question of knowing what people are looking at and targeting them and getting the message out. People have not had problems finding us.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: We've heard from some other organizations: the Royal Canadian Legion and others. Is there any level of collaboration among the various organizations? Sometimes it looks as though the services you offer overlap, and if you're working in your own silo it really doesn't make things any better. Is there a way to join forces?

Mr. Don Ludlow: In one sense our organization is a kind of ex-military network of ex-military leaders. We don't really offer services per se. It's more a member support group and everything like that. We're a not-for-profit with pretty limited resources, but we try to help wherever we can. We try to make ourselves aware of all the organizations and services that are out there. There are many of them and they're all doing great work.

There probably is a better opportunity to create some kind of single forum to which people can go and very quickly find at least the organization that might be able to help them with a particular need or something like that. That's something to consider, I think.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Rafferty.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Thank you, Chair, and thank you all for being here today.

I agree entirely with the Treble Victor Group concerning transition well in advance and education, and so on. Is it that you would envision, after basic training, that the first hand they shake are the commander's and then the Veterans Affairs representative is right beside him or her, as they enter into their career in the military? Is that what you envision? Is it feasible?

In addition, within DND is there room for Veterans Affairs to be prompting people all the way through to be thinking about their post-career?

Mr. Don Ludlow: I certainly like to think there's room for someone to be doing that. Whether it's Veterans Affairs or another department or group within DND is probably best figured out by you folks and DND, but you really need this to be a part of the career management and planning system. It can't be something at the side of people's desks, because otherwise they'll ignore it.

It should be part of the discussion that people have as part of their career: how you do educational skills and upgrading and start to set yourself up for success not only in your military career but in a post-military career as well. It's almost like a value proposition.

The U.S. is very good at saying, come and serve with us. You'll have some fun, you'll do great things, travel the world, and by the way, you'll be able to get a university degree and when you leave tons of people will want to hire you. As a result of that, it's seen as an employer of choice. They get lots of great talent, and lots of people leave and then are great advocates for veterans. I'm not sure we quite have that great virtuous circle going in Canada yet.

• (0930)

Mr. David Macdonald: It's important to note that currently for Veterans Affairs.... You asked whether they might be able to come into play with DND. I can say from my personal experience as a reservist that there's no way to go but up.

When I first came home, there was no Veterans Affairs representative waiting for me. I didn't know the process. There was no one there until I finally talked to someone four years later. Having no representation there, I can say that there's definitely room to have someone there right now like that.

To get back to the question of where to start the process of having that career transition, there's no reason we can't start right at the basic training level, put an hour or two into the training assignment to start the career transition and the skills training right there.

One reason it takes so long to transition afterwards, when you have joined the military, rather than doing it the other way around, is that you literally get beaten into you what it's like to be in the military. You start talking military, you start literally exuding and living military. Then, when you come out and you meet an employer,

you'll explain, "I'm a sergeant with an AWACS course and Task Force 308 experience." This doesn't mean anything, unfortunately, to that corporate hire. You may have a CEO who is going to hire a thousand veterans a year for the next 10 years, but then it gets down to the HR level and they don't understand.

You can teach that veteran to talk corporate and to get that skills transition, but if you don't teach corporate Canada to speak a little military and to understand.... It's a two-way street. Right now we're only teaching the one way, and it's hitting a roadblock on the corporate side. We need to do it on both sides.

Mr. John Rafferty: Okay, so—

Yes, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Would you mind sharing your time with Mr. Stoffer for half a minute?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I'll leave it until the very end.

The Chair: Well, make sure he doesn't go beyond the end.

Go ahead, Mr. Rafferty.

Mr. John Rafferty: Just very quickly.... I may have lost my train of thought here now.

Are you suggesting that Veterans Affairs really needs to begin some sort of system of outreach, not just within DND but outside of DND in the employer world, something that Veterans Affairs does not do now?

Mr. Don Ludlow: Part of it could be in the way a veteran is defined and what they view as the universe of people they're working with. Is it simply people who have approached Veterans Affairs and are seeking support and services, or is it everyone who has served in uniform? Is it everyone who even might still be in uniform?

We would argue for the broadest possible definition in terms of support and talking with everyone about how they set themselves up for a post-military career, because at some point everyone leaves serving in uniform.

Mr. John Rafferty: Does Mr. Ralph have a moment to respond?

No? Okay.

Peter.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: When I first became an MP, there were concerns about private companies raiding the military for highly skilled technicians. Sometimes we can be too successful in training and educating mechanics, avionics technicians, and those types of workers. Companies come along and say, "Wow! I have a 20-year guy here in the military. I just offered him something. He's going to get his pension, and we offer him a nice little job over here, and we don't have to do much training—he just slips over."

I don't want to sound negative, because obviously when military people retire they can do whatever they wish, but is there not also the possibility that sometimes the government is spending all sorts of money investing in a military person and it's a private company that ends up benefiting from all of it? Once that 20-year person leaves, for example, Shearwater, we have to get somebody else in there, and it takes an awful lot of money and resources to build that back up.

Sometimes we can be too successful in this regard. How would we avoid those pitfalls?

The Chair: I want you to note that you have eaten up all the available time, but I'm curious, too.

I invite you to be more succinct than him.

Mr. Phil Ralph: Yes.

Now you're talking about an overall societal benefit, because it works both ways. For the longest time, as I told you, I served with an engineer unit. We had guys who were truck drivers, all civilian-employed. They couldn't get equivalency in the military.

You might say, for example, this thing has a backhoe and everything, yet we have to take the military course. This makes no sense. We're using taxpayer resources to train somebody to do something they already know how to do. It works both ways, but as an integrated...because it benefits all of society. The more skilled any citizen is, whether inside the military or outside, the greater the benefit to society.

We haven't really had people knocking down base doors to get people out of uniform to employ them. That hasn't been our problem. The problem has been transitioning people out of uniform.

● (0935)

The Chair: Mr. Hawn.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here.

Following up on that last point, Edmonton and Cold Lake have had a heck of a time being raided—by the oil patch, primarily. It is a benefit to society—that's not an issue—but it can be a problem for certain areas.

Mr. Patriquin, you talked about the importance of understanding that PTSD is not just military. My wife, who is a nurse, had a short incident with PTSD over the loss of a rodeo accident patient who died under her care; she saw our son in that young man. She got over it fairly quickly, but it's a question of education, broad education.

This may be peeing in the wind, but is there a role for the media to play—there are all kinds of programs, such as *W5* or whatever—in doing a broad educational piece across a couple of networks on what PTSD means and who is affected by it, in order to get away from the PTSD connection with the military or veteran community? Is there a role for the media to play in that?

Mr. Tim Patriquin: I think there is.

On a very small scale we have Lieutenant-Colonel Chris Linford and his spouse, who are travelling the country talking about his experience, and not just his experience as a veteran but his wife's and his family's experience through the PTSD trials and tribulations. I think that's one small example of how we can educate folks. An idea such as a *W5* or a broad Canadian educational program that doesn't talk about PTSD as a veteran-specific issue but as a societal issue would, I think, be very beneficial.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Macdonald, you talked about the difficulty of interviews sometimes, and so on, and the employer not

understanding. Is there a role for case managers to play? Somebody in that situation, I would assume, probably would have a case manager. Is there a role for a case manager to play in an interview? Or would that be too much baggage to take to an interview?

Mr. David Macdonald: I would say that there's always a role, necessarily, for a case manager to play. But you have to remember also that our case managers currently are quite occupied, we'll say, with the caseloads they have, so unless we're willing to throw in some extra money to hire some more case managers to handle that case—

Hon. Laurie Hawn: We're hiring another 100. I don't know if you're aware of that.

Mr. David Macdonald: Yes, I'm aware of that. I'm just saying that I have several friends who are case managers in different areas throughout Ontario, and they're absolutely jam-packed right now. They can't take on a case of transition, so—

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I think it's all part of educating society and corporate Canada.

Mr. David Macdonald: Yes, it's about building that resiliency from the start for anything like that, because what it comes down to, and I've said this. In any of these programs this can't be seen as a handout to the military, because as a member who wears the uniform I'm not going to accept a handout. I've gone through 10 years of military training. You can call it “too proud”, but also, I believe in my own skills. I believe that I have the right stuff to do the job. I've always proved, both in Canada and overseas, that I can do the job, so this has to be seen as a hand up, not a handout.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I understand.

We have two excellent organizations here. There are many other excellent organizations, as we've talked about. Were both organizations, the Treble Victor Group and Wounded Warriors Canada, at the stakeholder summit here last week?

Mr. Tim Patriquin: Treble Victor was not.

Mr. Phil Ralph: No, we were not.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I'm sorry to hear that.

● (0940)

Mr. Phil Ralph: We've been at previous stakeholder meetings with the minister. We were at the one they held in Toronto at the RCMI, so we've had our input there. We can't be at all of them.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: No, I understand that. I assume you were invited.

I wanted to talk about the importance of those kinds of meetings. I'm sorry you weren't there, because I wanted to ask some specific questions about the experience last week in terms of the collaboration among organizations.

I guess I'll ask a general question, probably of Ralph and Mr. Ludlow. In those kinds of summits in terms of getting the various organizations together, as I think Mr. Lizon mentioned, people are doing different things. Each of your silos is a good silo, but to promote a broader understanding so that there can be areas of cooperation moving forward, how important are those kinds of get-togethers?

Mr. Phil Ralph: It's important to know the landscape and to know what's out there. It's a good question. It's been alluded to a number of times concerning cooperation and overlap, etc.

I think there's a kind of a myth that there is a whole bunch of overlap. The things we do are unique, and when we don't have a resource that addresses the particular need of a veteran who comes to us, rather than reinventing the wheel, knowing what's out there, there is cooperation in that area in regard to referring him to an organization that does have the resource.

Cooperation doesn't mean melding all the organizations together and making one big bureaucracy, because we know what happens with bureaucracies sometimes. Our funding and our programs are unique and very targeted. The landscape of what Treble Victor Group does is very different from what we do, so if we have a veteran who is in need of their services, instead of saying that we have to keep him and do it ourselves, we say, "Here you go."

That's the level of cooperation, knowing what's out there, knowing the resources, doing what's best for the veteran and for their family, and using the available resources. If it's our program, wonderful. If it's somebody else's, fantastic.

Mr. Tim Patriquin: I think it's important to note that there are several buckets, if you will, of stakeholders. I think the minister had three. I think our organizations fall into the third. That summit was only for the first two buckets, so it's not like we're being excluded.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: No, I understand.

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

Mr. Lemieux, you have at most three minutes.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Do you see the discrimination?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: He picks on me. It's all the time.

First of all, I want to thank you for coming here today. It's very educational for us as committee members to plug into you directly and to hear what you're doing on the ground to support veterans, and also, I think, to help Canadians support veterans. I think Canadians want to support veterans. They sometimes don't know how to go about it or what organizations are active, so your outreach is really important.

I wanted to ask Wounded Warriors about your program, the Can Praxis PTSD equine program. I had somebody ask me about it just this week. The person was a potential service provider, someone who said that they had heard about it. They obviously had read an article in the paper about equine therapy for veterans.

I wanted to ask you a little about the program, particularly, though, in terms of access. How would a veteran access the program? How would veterans find out where it's offered and how would they get access?

The second thing is that if there's a service provider, an equine organization or a farm with horses that are trained for therapy, etc., how would they let you know that they are available to assist with this program?

Mr. Phil Ralph: Boy, you opened up a huge question, but I'll try to answer it within the time limit of the chair.

First of all, any veteran anywhere in Canada can access Can Praxis. They can contact us, or they can contact the individuals at Can Praxis directly. Again, we'll provide transportation. Currently, the program takes place at Rocky Mountain House in Alberta. There will be two serials run in Ontario this summer and fall. The only reason we move it is, again, to cut down on plane fare and those kinds of things to save money.

The difficulty with many of these programs is about standards and about making sure of and maintaining quality. Having a ranch and having a horse does not make a program. It's having the right combination and having it evidence-based.

Our program has been studied by Dr. Randy Duncan at the University of Saskatchewan, so it has been academically studied. There has been one pilot project studied by Veterans Affairs Canada. It's very unique. I mean, there's a lot of equine therapy that's out there and does some good things in many areas, but this one for veterans and their spouses is very specific and has some very specific things in it.

It's more the people that run the program than the horses and the ranch where it's held.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I actually think horses are very noble and very majestic animals and I think there is a bonding that takes place. My daughters used to ride, and I know the kind of relationship that can form.

Are you standing? Is it over? I'm sorry. I saw you look that way.

I'll stop there, Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: You're so kind, Mr. Lemieux.

I want to thank the witnesses from Treble Victor Group and Wounded Warriors Canada. I was both touched and inspired by what I heard, and I think my colleagues will feel the same and appreciate what they have learned from you.

Thank you for your services to Canada and for what you continue to do.

We will now suspend the meeting so that these people can go and all hug you.

We will suspend two minutes, no more, because we need to listen to our ombudsman, Mr. Parent, right after.

● (0940)

(Pause)

● (0950)

The Chair: The second half of today's meeting offers a few complications. Since I'm the servant of the committee I'd like to put them on the table right now.

As you notice from over here, it took more than two minutes to do the transition. Then at the end, the committee will need 15 minutes to deal with the other matter I referred to earlier, and we might also need about five minutes to discuss committee business for next week.

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Chair, I think we should just go with the plan, which is to leave 15 minutes at the end of the meeting to go over committee business. I don't think we can extend the meeting because a lot of us have commitments and we simply can't stay later. I would say, let's just launch and partition off 15 minutes at the end of the meeting where we'll deal with committee business.

The Chair: I want to draw to the attention of the committee that Mr. Lemieux is now the poster boy for someone who doesn't pay attention to the chair.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Parent.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for all you do, all you've done and all you will do.

Mr. Guy Parent (Veterans Ombudsman, Office of the Veterans Ombudsman): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you.

[*English*]

Before we begin, I would like to thank you for your unwavering support of veterans and their families. The recent announcements by the Minister of Veterans Affairs are narrowing the gap in areas of the new veterans charter that you identified in your June 2014 report, "The New Veterans Charter: Moving Forward".

[*Translation*]

The announced changes do not encompass all that is needed for veterans but they have kick-started the renewal process, and your leadership played a big part in making that happen. As veterans ombudsman, I thank you and look forward to continued progress.

[*English*]

I have read all of the testimony to date from your hearings on the transition of our servicemen and women from military to civilian life. I find most of it focused on individual services and programs. While that is important, I believe that it is of equal importance for you to look at transition from a holistic, veteran-centric and strategic perspective.

The complexity and confusion of the transition process, accessibility to programs and services, and the eligibility requirements are evident in the testimony to date. In order to make meaningful recommendations we need to understand the transition process, issues, and requirements. This is why my office has joined together with the office of the ombudsman of National Defence and Canadian Forces to identify the hurdles experienced by our medically releasing CAF members and to suggest some solutions.

As I see it, a key transition issue that has been overlooked by almost everyone is the impact of military culture and ethos. From the time a young man or woman joins the Canadian Armed Forces, everything is mission-oriented. Every detail of his or her life is looked after in order to accomplish the mission.

Our servicemen and women are known for their can-do attitude, for making the impossible possible, and for protecting the weak and the vulnerable. We need to make the transition process mission-oriented and CAF should provide ongoing support to members

throughout the transition process. That will give our releasing members a positive, focused experience that will generate hope.

● (0955)

[*Translation*]

Our joint systemic review began in early 2014 as a result of the well-documented need to ensure that the transition process be as seamless as possible. The goal of this joint effort is to identify and recommend ways to streamline processes and support services for transitioning members and their families.

[*English*]

During the initial phase of our review, we mapped the transition process and experience of medically releasing a regular force member from the time a permanent medical category is assigned until the member is integrated into Veterans Affairs Canada. In the course of this work, over 50 recommendations and responses from recent House of Commons, Senate, and Auditor General reports have been reviewed.

There are five core issues to a seamless transition that our team has noted to date: governance, program-centric service delivery, financial aspects, families, and communication.

Within governance there is no integrated CAF-Veterans Affairs Canada accountability framework with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. We have two departments supporting transition with each operating within their own accountability framework. This results in duplication of effort, gaps, and inconsistencies across groups and geographic regions. There is no single, central tracking, monitoring, or follow-up system for all medically releasing CAF members. There are no integrated CAF-VAC service delivery standards to measure successful transition outcomes or criteria to evaluate the transition process.

For program-centric service delivery, the programs and services for medically releasing servicemen and women need to be veteran-centric. At the moment they are not. There are some specific areas of concern. Within the CAF-VAC there are at least 15 key organizations, each with their own business process, often delivering transition services in silos.

Currently both CAF and VAC case managers work independently with no formal coordination or monitoring. Resource constraints, including the number of available CAF and VAC case managers, result in interview delays and inconsistent service standards across the country. Today approximately 10% of all medically releasing members are deemed to be complex cases and receive an integrated transition plan.

All medically releasing members should have the opportunity to plan and coordinate their transition.

There are two primary vocational rehabilitation programs: service income security insurance plan, SISIP, and VAC's rehabilitation program. Each program has different eligibility criteria, different assessment requirements, and different benefits. A third-party review is needed to make an informed decision prior to any changes.

VAC must be engaged earlier in the transition process to ensure benefits and services are in place at release. Currently, VAC's initial engagement begins with the transition interview after receipt of the release message, generally within six months of the release date. That is too late.

Available services at the joint personnel support unit and integrated personnel support centres are not consistent across the country, and the partners are not always co-located under one roof to provide the veteran-centric, one-stop shop. Importantly, only those medically releasing CAF members with significant medical employment limitations are posted to the JPSUs.

Individual consent is a barrier to seamless transition as consent is required from each service provider to share information. Without it the service provider cannot share information, nor engage in substantive discussion about transition needs.

Concerning the financial aspect, the 2013 "Life After Service" study identified that those who had a medical release experienced a 20% decline in post-release income. This stresses the importance of ensuring benefits and services are in place at the time of release to alleviate the financial strain for vulnerable CAF members and their families. The current 16-week delay of the Canadian Forces first pension payment is problematic, as many CAF members do not have sufficient financial resources available to compensate for that delay.

[Translation]

Now, let's turn to support for families. Transition services and programs are not easily available or accessible to spouses and children. If spouses work outside the home or have childcare responsibilities, they may not be available during regular work hours to participate in the integrated transition plan interview.

•(1000)

[English]

Relative to communication, as others appearing before you have also emphasized, the volume of information a member receives during transition is currently overwhelming and may contribute to what is already a stressful and confusing situation for an injured member who may not be leaving the forces voluntarily.

There is currently no single point of contact or face-to-face navigator to advise, assist, and monitor the development and implementation of a transition plan. Some CAF members are not aware of the IPSCs and services offered, while others are still reluctant to access them. Unfortunately, as attendance at the SCAN program is not mandatory and occurs late in the release process, members may not be well prepared for their transition.

[Translation]

In conclusion, a successful transition for a medically releasing serviceman or woman is key to financial independence, quality of personal and family life, and improved health.

[English]

The goal of our joint project is to build on the mission-oriented military culture and ethos, and work toward ensuring that through clear communications and an integrated approach transition, services and benefits will be ready at the time of release.

I hope that our final product will be as useful to you and the veterans community as was my 2013 report on the new veterans charter. I believe that with a focused effort, leadership, and vision, we can create a world-class transition experience to integrate medically releasing personnel, veterans, and their families into civilian life. They have so much to offer Canadian employers due to the skills, experience, leadership, and personal attributes they acquired through their military service. Investing in their successful transition is not only good for veterans and their families, it is also good for business and good for Canada's economic prosperity.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you kindly, Mr. Parent.

I'd like to apologize to the committee. I forgot to introduce Sharon Squire.

[English]

You are also welcome at this table.

If you liked the six-minute rule we had during the first half, you're going to love this one. For this session it's going to be five minutes. You want to share it with your friend...?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: With Monsieur Chicoine...

The Chair: With Monsieur Chicoine...? Share away.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you.

[English]

First of all, Mr. Parent, I want to thank you and your staff for your great work when it comes to our veterans and their families and communities. You really are doing fantastic work and we greatly appreciate all of that.

I understand you'll be going over to the Netherlands very soon with a delegation. Please give the old home country our very best. One veteran you'll be meeting is Jock McStay. He's from Chezzetcook, Nova Scotia. Give him my very best as well.

Thank you.

Sylvain.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Thank you to our witnesses. Mr. Parent, Ms. Squire, welcome and thank you for being here today.

Ombudsman, you said you had begun a comprehensive review of the transition process just over a year ago. I couldn't tell whether you had completed that review and were going to report on your findings.

Mr. Guy Parent: We are currently in the first phase of the review, but we have made some preliminary observations.

We have already notified both departments, the Department of National Defence and the Department of Veterans Affairs, of our findings so far in order to facilitate ongoing improvements. I mentioned a few things in my opening remarks. Certainly, something that's quite significant is the fact that the language used by the Department of Veterans Affairs to talk about transition is completely different from that used by the Department of National Defence. I think that, at the very least, it would be important to make sure that they use the same terminology.

One of the best examples of confusing terminology for veterans is the term case manager. At the Department of National Defence, case managers are health professional experts who handle the medical aspect of the transition process. At the Department of Veterans Affairs, however, case managers deal with the psychosocial dimension of the transition process for veterans. So it leads to confusion among veterans, and that's a serious issue.

Something else that other witnesses and committee members alike have brought up is the fact that the Department of Veterans Affairs should enter into the transition process much earlier than it does right now. In your discussions with the previous group of witnesses, it was even suggested that transition planning be incorporated into a member's initial career training, that the member learn about the programs and benefits available to veterans.

•(1005)

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: I can understand why a member of the military or a veteran would be confused; it's quite complicated. I even have trouble following certain aspects.

You also talked about the fact that you had already started mapping the transition process. I'm a pretty visual person, so seeing the mapped out process would help me. I'm not sure whether you'd be able to provide the committee with something—not today, of course—but having a diagram or map of that nature might help us understand the whole transition process a bit better.

Is that something you've already completed?

Mr. Guy Parent: Yes, we'll provide the committee with a document that has at least one flow map, but it's complex.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: It's complex, indeed.

Mr. Guy Parent: Without an explanation, it's complex.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: I'd very much like to see it, if you have it. It would help me understand the process better since it is, indeed, quite complex.

One of the issues you raised was governance, and you briefly explained where things stood in that regard. I'm not sure whether it's too early in the process for you to elaborate on how that governance component could be improved, in your view. Would that mean merging certain services? Can you tell us more about that?

Mr. Guy Parent: It's the office's view that the discretion to make decisions should fall on a single department or an individual jointly appointed by both departments. Under the current regime, some decision-makers work for Veterans Affairs Canada and others work for the Department of National Defence. No real joint decision-making authority exists. Decisions are made by both departments, and then we end up chasing our tails in order to solve release-related problems. The transition process needs to be fully integrated. Decisions should be made by an authority that both departments recognize.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: I expect that would help with all of the business processes.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux, you may go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you very much for being here in front of committee today and for highlighting what we're studying, which is the transition process as well as transitioning programs. Maybe that's where I'd like to shift my questioning at the beginning. Some of the transition that a veteran goes through is related to process and of course some of it is related to programming in terms of what kind of tangible support they receive.

I wanted to ask a few questions about some of the more recent announcements. I ask it because the recent announcements by the minister are very much aligned with recommendations that you had made as the veterans ombudsman and also aligned well with recommendations that the committee made. Some were implemented and some were not quite implemented.

For example, I'm not going to list them all, but could I ask you to perhaps comment on the reserve parity? That is respect for reservists and of course that announcement was saying that part-time reservists would be treated, in terms of access to the benefit that they receive, the same as a full-time, regular force soldier. I'm wondering if you might have a comment on that. Did that achieve what it was you were hoping it would achieve when you made the recommendation?

Mr. Guy Parent: Certainly to us it met the intent of one of our recommendations, which we considered one of the most important ones in the new veterans charter improvements and the recommendations from the committee. I think what's important is that it also supports the theme that we have in the office that a veteran is a veteran. Wherever you get injured and whatever your status is at the time, it is not important. If you suffer an injury, whether it's physical or psychological, because of your service, then the government is responsible to treat you at the same level. We welcome that.

It's very early in the stages now to comment on the fairness of those programs because people are just now starting to access these new benefits. The one that you were talking about is one of the ones that was introduced by regulation and not legislation, which is good and certainly easier and faster than the other way. I certainly encourage the committee, whenever you look at Bill C-58, to put it through as quickly as possible.

• (1010)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: That was my next question, because you're right, the reserve parity initiative has already been implemented through regulation. There are others that require a change in the act or in law, for example, and then will be followed by regulation.

You kind of answered my question. I was going to ask whether your recommendation would be that these initiatives should be supported so they can move forward.

Mr. Guy Parent: Certainly they're moving in the right direction and they're narrowing the gaps that exist in the new veterans charter. What's important for us is that I'm an advocate of fairness. I can not judge fairness in the aspects of adequacy, sufficiency, and access until the regulations are in place and those programs are active. At that point in time I can give you a much more substantial answer as to the fairness of the program. Certainly they are narrowing the gaps on the new veterans charter and I encourage the committee to go ahead and approve them.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Great, thank you for that.

I wanted to also mention something else. We've had a number of witnesses and I know you've been reading through all the transcripts. We had SISIP come and SISIP brought with them a lot of information about the programming that they offer. One of the comments that they did not make, but which I asked about afterwards—and that's kind of why I want to raise it right now—was their accidental dismemberment insurance policy.

When a soldier is injured, I think there is a fairly good understanding about the disability award, which is roughly \$300,000 or up to \$300,000 depending on the nature of the injury. It is delivered by Veterans Affairs. What's not always understood is that all soldiers, serving soldiers, are paying into SISIP. One of the benefits that SISIP offers is the accidental dismemberment insurance policy, which will pay up to \$250,000. This is not to be confused with the disability award for accidental dismemberment, which could include for example, the more seriously injured veterans or serving members, the loss of a limb, the loss of eyes, that type of an insurance policy. The access to concrete tangible benefits in terms of an injury has two components to it. It has the SISIP component of up to \$250,000 and the disability award of up to \$300,000.

I'm wondering if you have a comment on that. Is that good? Have you had many complaints about that, or have you found that veterans appreciate having up to a maximum of \$500,000 worth of compensation for a more serious injury?

Mr. Guy Parent: Mr. Chair, in the....

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Parent, Mr. Lemieux left you three seconds to answer that.

Mr. Guy Parent: Three seconds!

The Chair: The committee is going to top you up 57 seconds.

[*English*]

Mr. Guy Parent: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Any complaints about SISIP of course would be directed toward the military DND ombudsman. Certainly a lot of people don't understand that there are complementary systems. SISIP is very often the first payer because it is an insurance company. In many cases they will provide, for instance, the vocational rehab program for the first two years. After that, VAC takes over. People have to understand that there are complementary systems. What people get from Veterans Affairs Canada is not the only payment that they get. Sometimes there are other benefits that kick into play.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Valeriotte, go ahead.

Mr. Frank Valeriotte: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for appearing before the committee and for all the work that you are doing. I have seen it and it is very much appreciated.

You mentioned an ethos that exists in the military culture. I think in the States they call it "sanctuary syndrome". You are looked after. Everything is covered, and all of a sudden you are out there on your own. I think in large part that contributes to the severity of the PTSD that may be suffered. I am speaking particularly of the families. You talked about the families in transition. You have heard conversation around this table about better engaging spouses. I am wondering if you can comment on the inadequacy of our response to those needs and what more can be done to engage spouses.

You know Jenifer Migneault has been active in encouraging training of family members to deal with PTSD to relieve VAC, doctors, and others from that responsibility. Can you comment on that? What might be done by the government even in supporting the NGOs, such as Wounded Warriors and others, that are trying to do this so that they can contract it out in some cases?

• (1015)

Mr. Guy Parent: Thank you for that question.

I think families are very important. They are not issued by the military. People have families. It is just recently that National Defence has realized that young soldiers have parents. If you get injured when you are 18 or 19 years old, they will be mostly the ones looking after you as caregivers. Yes, families are important. There is not enough being done at this point in time, although there are some movements afoot to bring some improvements there.

I think what is also important is the fact that, even for the healthy veteran, the family's transition is a challenge. I am not too sure that National Defence and VAC have the release and transition process in place for the healthy veterans. Certainly it is a good place to start and realize that the family is there. There is quite an impact on the family when you leave the forces.

I served for 37 years, and I moved every three years. We really had no anchor town anywhere or that sort of thing. To go from that kind of a lifestyle—and it is not a job; it is a profession and a lifestyle—to a completely new world is quite challenging, quite daunting. Imagine if you have psychological or physical injuries on top of that. It's even worse.

The involvement of the spouse in the transition process needs to be mandatory. Of course, it is always an individual's choice, but certainly people have to be encouraged to bring the family into the transition process. I believe that our research and the review that we are doing right now with DND will probably bring that to the forefront as well.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: You mentioned case management in point 2 of your presentation, as well as the independence of the CAF and VAC case managers, and the lack of coordinated transition. I recall some testimony that was given by a young veteran who appeared before us who said that his medical reports, which caused his medically related release from the forces, identified very severe injuries, emotional and otherwise. Then, when he got to VAC, he essentially had to start all over again with new assessments by VAC doctors, which disregarded in fact the severity that was identified by the forces' doctors.

Is that a gap that actually exists? I was overwhelmed by that. Is that the case, that they don't know the situation from which the force member is coming when they come into VAC?

Mr. Guy Parent: I think one of the important factors there is the disconnect between CF case managers and VAC case managers, and the inability to pass on the right information because of privacy issues, privacy matters. As I said before, the DND case manager is based on a healthy transition to medical care, the spectrum of care, whereas in the VAC, one is looking at the psychosocial.

But there is an interaction between the two and the information must be passed on. At this point it's not, so there needs to be a better flow of information from one to the other.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: To me it just seems simple. You have them sign a release so when they leave this information can move forward. Why wouldn't that be standard protocol?

Mr. Guy Parent: As I mentioned before, there are I think up to 10 different consent forms right now that people have to fill out so that everybody is involved and the integration knows about the circumstances. Yet we know for a case of PTSD, psychological injury, that if you have to repeat your story consistently that is also sometimes a trigger. This is why, when we have files that we need to send to DND, we can do a hot transfer and we explain the facts to the DND ombudsman as opposed to having the individual repeat his story.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you kindly, Mr. Parent.

[English]

Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Thank you very much.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Parent, for the work that you and Ms. Squire do for our veterans. We much appreciate it.

Just following up on that last point. Is it not true now that medical files are passed when the member departs, so at VAC there shouldn't be as much of a gap in understanding what the person is being released for? Is that a fair statement?

• (1020)

Mr. Guy Parent: I believe they're going to a digitized system eventually and I think the priority will be to medically release. So yes, eventually it will be a fairly simple task. But again it's not just passing the file, it's the acceptance of the evidence.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: But coordination is going on between VAC and DND to harmonize the understanding of a medical condition.

Mr. Guy Parent: Yes, action is being taken on that.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: You mentioned that only those medically released CAF members with significant medical employment limitations are posted to the JPSU. Who should be posted to the JPSU, all veterans or should the threshold of medical necessity just be lowered?

Mr. Guy Parent: That's a very good question, but I don't think it's the JPSU as a unit that's important. It's the process within, because there is assistance.

I also made the statement that maybe all medically released personnel should have some kind of a transition plan or coordination opportunity, which they don't now. It's because the people who have a non-complex situation are simply being released and there is no real issue about transition. They stay within their unit until they're released. They're not necessarily posted to a JPSU.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: So there should be more people...?

Mr. Guy Parent: Or a transition process of some sort so they could go to JPSUs and get some kind of a coordinated and planned transition.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: On the issue that was just brought up I think by Mr. Valeriote or maybe you mentioned it, Ombudsman, of repeating for the system what somebody's condition is, I think that was misunderstood.

This is the 11-page medical questionnaire “Activities of daily living” and I'm sure you're familiar with it. It's available online. It's a long questionnaire. It really is designed to ask if your condition is getting better or worse, if your treatment is still appropriate, and if there is more we need to do. It's not designed for a person with a particular injury. It's designed for veterans who are receiving treatment of some kind, writ large.

Nowhere in here does it ask if anybody's limbs have grown back or not. If I understand, it's the sensitivity of some people to questions. They might read something into the question. Does the form need to be simplified down to three or four questions? For example, “How's it going?” or “Is there more we can do?”

Mr. Guy Parent: I believe the department is working on a plan now. I know for sure on the veterans independence program, for instance, that rather than having to fill out complex forms, we'll simply contact the individual and ask if there are any changes.

I think we have to understand that a lot of it is culture. It came from years ago when people were on the one-year disability pension for life and then people had to confirm they were still alive and that their condition didn't worsen so they could meet their needs. That's why it was implemented. Now maybe that's gone a little too far, but there's a move afoot now to simplify that and certainly to move it to three years instead of one year to facilitate it.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Simple is good, but the whole intent of the forms and the process is to make sure that the treatment is still appropriate.

Mr. Guy Parent: That the needs are still being met, I think that's the best way to describe it.

Ms. Sharon Squire (Deputy Veterans Ombudsman, Executive Director Operations, Office of the Veterans Ombudsman): We've been asked to participate with the department on the letters and forms review, to try to help make them simple and to make recommendations.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Good. Thank you.

Just quickly, the stakeholder summit was held last week; I know you were there. I mentioned this also to the Treble Victor and Wounded Warriors folks. In your view, what was the result of that, broadly speaking, in terms of getting those kinds of groups together? It's not to meld them into one, but it's to understand what's going on in the broad scope of “If I can't provide it, maybe somebody else can”.

What was the result of that whole summit?

Mr. Guy Parent: I would say that it was one of the best get-togethers I've seen in the veterans community. I think the acceptance of the social media groups that are not necessarily membership-type organizations was a good move. People were generally very pleased with the discussions that took place. Everybody was able to put forward their intent, and their vision of the veterans of the future, which was good. We still don't have the minutes or the records of discussion for that meeting, but overall I must say it was certainly well received.

There's also the fact that, as was mentioned earlier, recognizing that there are many different groups, the people who try to support the veterans community through campaigns, charitable donations,

and that sort of thing were not excluded. A discussion will take place with them later on.

• (1025)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Good.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Parent.

[*English*]

I have a little note here, written by the Honourable Diane Ablonczy, that says, “If drafted, I will serve.”

You are being drafted—for three minutes.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): All right. That's great.

Mr. Parent and Ms. Squire, in my business we have to make a quick judge of people. My assessment is that you have a genuine heart for the work you do. This is not a bureaucratic exercise to you. I just want to compliment you on that. I haven't been to this committee ever before, but I'm very respectful of what you're doing.

With respect to the privacy issue, I'm wondering why there couldn't just be a form where the forces member says, for instance, in part A, I authorize my personal information to be used, and in part B, I authorize my personal information to be used by other departments and agencies.

I mean, isn't that a simple thing to fix?

Mr. Guy Parent: Yes. In fact it's a good comment. The work to date on the joint review of the transition process with the DND ombudsman leads us to that conclusion. It will probably be one of our recommendations to have one consent form that is all-encompassing.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: Who has to make it so?

Mr. Guy Parent: Well, again, it's supposed to be an integrated transition program or system, but it isn't quite integrated yet. Because there are two independent ministers who are actually involved there, with no single authority or accountability, the decisions take a long time to come.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: I know both ministers and they're pretty sensible people.

Maybe, Mr. Chair, the parliamentary secretary could knock heads together and say, “Here's a form. Get it out there.”

But maybe that's too simple.

Mr. Guy Parent: If I may, though, we only started this work recently. As I mentioned, we submitted two preliminary finding letters to our respective ministers. There seems to be a real will to make it veteran-centric and as simple as we can. It's just a matter of getting it together now.

I'm sure our report will probably facilitate a lot of these things.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: Yes. I would think you're right, and certainly hope so.

With respect to the two departments involved, we've all been around long enough to know that there's some turf protection, some "this is the way we've always done this." The cultures are kind of hidebound, shall we say. In your view, what is the tipping point that would lead to true integration of the provision of services for veterans?

Mr. Guy Parent: I think it's the single accountability, the single responsibility, as I said before. Right now the decisions on certain transition situations actually go up two different silos. Then the decision-making authorities are on both sides at the top.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: But what's a solution?

Mr. Guy Parent: Well, to have one single entity that is fully integrated with accountability, recognized—

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: So if you had your druthers, would it be in DND or in Veterans Affairs?

Mr. Guy Parent: Either one, as long as it's recognized by both ministers—

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: You don't care.

Mr. Guy Parent: —having delegated authority.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: Right.

You also mentioned that you thought there should be a case worker or—

The Chair: Mrs. Ablonczy, you were drafted for three minutes. Your draft is over.

I want to thank you so much.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: I wanted to fill those three minutes, and I did.

The Chair: I want to thank you very much for the pertinence of the questions you've asked.

I especially want to thank Mr. Parent for the pertinence of the replies that he gave throughout his testimony today.

The committee has been anxious to hear from you, sir, and I know you've been anxious to present to us, and today was the perfect marriage.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

We're going to take a couple of minutes before transition to all individually say our goodbyes. But let's make those two minutes just two minutes.

Thank you.

● (1025)

(Pause)

● (1030)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We are now back on duty. The break is over.

I'd like to inform the committee that I received a letter from the chair of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, the member for Leeds—Grenville, Gordon Brown. The letter begins as follows:

Dear Mr. Galipeau,

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, I would like to invite the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to consider the subject matter of clause 1 of Bill C-597, An Act to amend the Holidays Act (Remembrance Day).

[*English*]

Who wants to start?

Mr. Valeriote, you have the floor.

Do you all have the copies of this letter that I've just made reference to?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Thank you, Chair.

I've been sitting at heritage committee during their deliberations, and it's... Are we in camera?

The Chair: We're not in camera

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Can I move that we go in camera?

The Chair: Do I do this by consensus or by voice?

An hon. member: By consensus, I think we all agree.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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