



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 037

Monday, February 13, 2023

Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg



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• (1550)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 37 of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Monday, October 3, 2022, the committee resumes its study on the national strategy for veterans employment after service.

[*Translation*]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the order of Thursday, June 23, 2022. We have members and witnesses attending in person and remotely using the Zoom application.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before you speak. I would remind you that all comments must go through the chair.

In accordance with our routine motion on sound tests, I wish to inform the committee that the witnesses completed the required sound tests prior to the meeting.

Now I would like to welcome our witnesses.

Today we are joined by retired Major André Thivierge, co-founder and co-chair of the City of Ottawa Veterans Task Force.

Thank you for joining us in person today. I know we ran into some technical difficulties last time.

[*English*]

From Veteran Staffing Canada we also have Jason Wahl, founder and director, by video conference.

[*Translation*]

From the Veterans Transition Network we also have Oliver Thorne, executive director, by video conference.

Let's begin with the witnesses' presentations.

Mr. Thivierge, as you know, I'm going to signal you when you have a minute left, and then again when your time is up. The floor is yours for the next five minutes.

Mr. André Thivierge (Co-Founder and Co-Chair, Major (Retired), City of Ottawa Veterans Task Force): Mr. Chair, honourable members of the committee, I have the pleasure of co-chair-

ing the City of Ottawa Veterans Task Force, which is tasked by city council with building bridges between the community and organizations in the national capital that provide services to our veterans.

When Canadian Forces members decide to transition to civilian life, they still have many more productive years to offer. Having a meaningful job has always been an important part of the transition. It's vital to understand that former military personnel have different motivations for seeking out a second career. What motivates veterans transitioning to civilian life isn't salary, rewards and benefits, but rather their desire to accomplish the mission and create a positive impact within their work environment. When a veteran becomes a member of a work team, the concept of serving remains a top priority.

Within the community of employers, there continue to be certain stigmas when it comes to seeing veterans as future employees, all of them related to the idea that veterans struggle with mental health problems. Some employers also seem to underestimate the importance of the skills acquired through military experience and training.

However, veterans also harbour certain perceptions and believe certain stigmas about employers. For example, a veteran may act with the belief that employers don't understand veterans, because they may believe that employers have a negative perception of military service and veterans as candidates for a job. These perceptions pose barriers to employment for the veteran and to recruitment for the employer.

One barrier that has contributed to fuelling stigma about veterans is the lack of dialogue between the ecosystem of support for veterans and employers, particularly those in the private sector. I believe that the next steps should involve bridging the gap between the veteran community and all industry sectors in order to address urban legends among both employers and transitioning veterans and gain a better understanding of their impact on the candidate-recruiter relationship. This type of dialogue would provide a foundation to help build productive long-term relationships between the military community and employers.

Within our task force, a number of initiatives have been developed to ensure that human resources departments apply recruitment strategies that recognize the needs and assets of veterans and are also involved in the process of preparing our veterans for the transition to a second career. These kinds of initiatives will inspire a change in culture, not only by preparing veterans for the transition by communicating information, but also by influencing recruitment strategies.

Watching the committee's meetings last week, I was very surprised to learn that relatively few veterans are employed in the federal public service. But what really shocked me was hearing that only 4% of the federal employees who provide services directly to the military community are veterans themselves. That tells me we have our work cut out for us.

In conclusion, the Canadian Armed Forces transition units have made tremendous progress over the past few years, because they've been able to professionalize their delivery of transition services. These services are now provided based on evidence, such as the domains of well-being.

In terms of all the aspects of the transition, particularly access to employment, we have proven that communities like the city of Ottawa can play a role in bringing people together and fostering partnerships based on productive ongoing dialogue. We will continue to build bridges between the employers operating in our community and the ecosystem of support for veterans.

Thank you.

• (1555)

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

Now let's go to Jason Wahl.

[*English*]

You have up to five minutes for your opening statement. Please open your mike and go ahead.

Mr. Jason Wahl (Founder and Director, Veteran Staffing Canada): First of all, I'd like to thank the chair very much for inviting us here today.

I'll give you a quick rundown. Veteran Staffing was launched in 2016 as an arm of Athenian Group, a technical staffing firm that we founded here in Alberta. We have clients across Canada whom we support in their staffing needs.

Part of that means we have clients looking to us for support in hiring veterans and trying to find sources for that. At the time, we had a resource: the Canada Company's MET program, which was a predecessor to the current transition program and which we found very beneficial. It had resources, so we were able to connect with veterans directly. They had a website on which they posted resumes and profiles we could reach out to. When that program was cancelled and VAC transitioned to the new program, we lost the ability to connect with veterans directly. I think that was something of a misstep in the last term.

I've been recruiting across Canada and the U.S. since I retired from the forces many years ago. One thing I've found is a general lack of ability to source veterans, beyond finding folks on general

websites, be it Indeed or Workopolis, where they identify themselves. Organizations, be they public or private, no longer have the ability to reach out to these individuals specifically. That's definitely a shortcoming, in our minds.

The current CTS program provides valued resources to veterans, such as resume writing and interview preparation guides, but it doesn't provide support to the employers for sourcing veterans. That's the area we need to focus on, if you're looking at a new transition program.

One of the other areas we were looking at was trying to find out how many veterans are presently leaving the Department of Defence. A while ago, CBC reported that in the 2021 census, approximately 461,000 veterans self-reported. Veterans Affairs Canada, using a mathematical equation, came up with 617,000 veterans. I think finding the actual number will greatly help us figure out how we can help transition these folks who are moving into the public sector.

Previously, we've had success supporting veterans moving into the public sector, but I think the biggest issue we have is finding the veterans themselves, when they're looking beyond the number of different non-profits that are supporting them.

We've come up with some suggestions and resources that we think would be beneficial.

One of these is a wage subsidy program similar to what's in place for students, newcomers to Canada or under-represented people in the workforce. That would give companies an incentive to go out and source these people.

Secondly, the biggest thing to take away would be a tool or website, run either by Veterans Affairs or externally, that organizations could access to source individuals directly. I think that's a tool we've been missing and desperately in need of since the program was cancelled a couple of years ago.

I look forward to any questions. Thank you.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Wahl.

[*Translation*]

We will now go to Oliver Thorne, from the Veterans Transition Network.

Mr. Thorne, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[*English*]

Mr. Oliver Thorne (Executive Director, Veterans Transition Network): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to be here today.

My name is Oliver Thorne. I'm the executive director of the Veterans Transition Network, which is a registered Canadian charity that provides counselling and transition programs for members and veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces. We deliver these programs across Canada for men and women, in English and French.

[*Translation*]

I just want to apologize to the francophone members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, because I'll be delivering my opening statement in English since my time is limited.

[*English*]

While employment is a common topic of discussion on our programs, the focus of the programs we deliver at VTN is on mental health, family relationships and the military-to-civilian transition. While I'm not by any means a subject matter expert in veteran employment, I can certainly provide the perspective of an organization that has provided transition services for veterans for over a decade.

With that in mind, I want to focus my testimony on two major topics today: access and cultural transition.

In the first place, in our experience delivering services to veterans across Canada for 10 years, a key issue they face in the success of any service they receive is the issue of access. A good employment program will not be effective if it is not accessible to veterans, and particularly if it's not accessible to veterans who struggle the most in transition.

We know from the research that there are a number of criteria associated with a greater difficulty in transition, including a longer service history, involuntary release, service in the junior ranks, service in the army and deployment. These are all associated with greater difficulty in transition after service.

My first recommendation is that if a veteran employment strategy is going to be effective, it must be built with the needs of these veterans in mind. To go even further, with these veterans specifically, for those who are struggling the most it is very likely that they will need other, more immediate transition and rehabilitation services before they are ready to receive employment services.

My second recommendation is that there should be a strong relationship between the veterans rehabilitation program and the services provided through the employment strategy, so they can refer back and forth and ensure that veterans don't slip through the cracks.

The second issue is cultural transition. For veterans, their employment transition occurs at the same time as a significant and major cultural and lifestyle transition. A good employment strategy has to acknowledge this fact and provide the appropriate supports to help veterans navigate that cultural transition so they can be successful in their civilian education and employment after service.

In our experience as a service provider, we see veterans reporting two major gaps. The first is a skills gap in certain skills that are required in a civilian environment versus those in the military. We see this particularly in professional communication style, and in financial literacy as well. These are pieces that both the private sector and the education sector do a very good job of preparing people for

when they go out into the working world after post-secondary education, but the requirements in these areas in the military and civilian context are quite different.

Once again, for an employment strategy to be successful, it must consider that and it must provide practical training to help bridge that skills gap.

The second gap that we see reported is around social support. Particularly for veterans moving from a service environment to post-secondary education, we see that very often their experience—where they are in terms of their personal transition and lifestyle—is quite different from the environment of other people around them in that context. Providing the appropriate supports so that their needs can be met and they have a place where they can interact with peers and receive social support is going to be critical to the success of those education and employment programs.

With that, thank you again for the opportunity to present. I welcome your questions.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thorne, and thank you to all of you. Also, thank you for the work you are doing for veterans.

On behalf of the committee, I'd like to say thank you for your service, Mr. Wahl and Mr. Thivierge.

Now we're going to start the round of questions of six minutes.

I'm pleased to start with Mrs. Cathay Wagantall, for six minutes, please.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and I thank you for your service, Mr. Wahl and Mr. Thivierge.

I'll start with you, if that's fine.

I am curious about your program. I see that you are partnered with Veterans Affairs, Soldier On and the Multifaith Housing Initiative here in Ottawa, which I think is wonderful.

You mentioned the problem with the public service and how there's a limited scope, it seems, of employed veterans within VAC itself. Recently the Public Service Commission—which is responsible for administering the hiring priorities within the public service—indicated that only 330 appointments out of 64,796 hires in 2021 and 2022 were veterans. That's less than half a percent.

You indicate that you're doing a lot of preparation; a lot of work has been done to build strong and enduring relationships, and a number of initiatives have been developed.

Are you indicating, then, that the City of Ottawa Veterans Task Force has articulated these initiatives and that you have them available in writing?

Mr. André Thivierge: Okay. We're a working group. Our second-career working group is initiating a relationship, particularly with the human resource departments. I think that's going to be a vast initiative, because our focus now is to get to the private enterprise, but the thing is the public sector.... We will get to the public sector, definitely—

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: That's what I wanted to hear. Thank you.

Then human resources within the public sector should also be able to take advantage of the things you are working on and learning here, and those will be transferred over to make sure those human resources departments have access to the same things that highlight the needs of veterans. Is that right?

Mr. André Thivierge: Yes. It is in our working plan to get to the public sector, but really, on the focus, rather than going to the CEOs of the companies, it's much more advantageous to go with the HR, because they are the ones who write the policy and who are in charge of recruitment, and this is really where we can influence.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: I'm really pleased to hear that.

As you're working, are there documents that will become available to indicate the successes you're having? I'm thinking of other communities as well that really need to incorporate this type of thing where they want to be an asset to veterans who are looking for employment.

Mr. André Thivierge: When we are more advanced in the process, there will eventually be documents. We are starting with notes from the meeting, from the round tables that we are doing. Eventually, that will translate into documents when we have sufficient material and tangible recommendations.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you very much.

I have one question for you, Mr. Thorne. You've indicated that although you received grants to enable the growth of the program, the Veterans Transition Network would remain an independent organization. Do you see that as a positive thing? Does that enable you to be more effective with the veterans you work with, and why so...?

Mr. Oliver Thorne: If I understand you correctly, you're referring specifically to the breakdown of funding between the government and private.... Is that correct?

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Yes.

Mr. Oliver Thorne: We are a registered service provider for Veterans Affairs Canada. We have been for almost a decade now.

What it means is that veterans with an eligible claim can attend our program and have those costs covered by Veterans Affairs. I would say that 30% to 50% of the veterans who access our program do not have a claim with Veterans Affairs, for whatever reason. Our organization is engaging with a segment of the veteran population that has been either unable or unwilling to access service from Veterans Affairs, so I would say it's partly a necessity.

It is partly by design that we seek charitable funding to support those veterans, because we never turn them away. They're always put through the program at no cost, but it's also a growing necessity because, although we're a registered service provider, we have seen the rate of approval for veterans who are eligible drop drastically, particularly over the past three years.

We see a number of veterans who are eligible to be funded by Veterans Affairs. They have the correct claim, but that paperwork is not being completed, and we are unfortunately not receiving those funds. As a matter of policy, we'll never turn them away, so we have to then lean on our charitable funding in order to ensure they get the program.

• (1610)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Okay. Thank you so much, and thank you for doing that.

I'd like to cede the last minute and a half or so to Terry.

Mr. Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you for being here today.

I have just one question. Really, the strategy for the veterans who struggle the most is a lot of the concern we hear. Probably the most shocking thing I've heard since I've been here is how many don't have homes, and you're not going to get a job if you don't have a place to live.

Has there ever been any thought from any organizations—the government seems to work in silos here—to work with employers to perhaps have some type of homes solution with some companies? In my riding, employers can't get employees, and they're doing that now for tourism, as an example, where they're going to build this. I would think that perhaps people who come out of the armed forces may be used to having people around, and it actually may work well. I just don't know if anyone has that as part of their strategy.

The Chair: Who is your question for?

Mr. Terry Dowdall: It's for any one of them.

Has there ever been any thought on that? You had a wage subsidy, as an example, for helping out. Do we have something that could tie into companies?

The Chair: Answer in 20 seconds, please.

Mr. Jason Wahl: I'll give you a quick example that does take place out here in Alberta.

ATCO is an example. They set up the transition villages for veterans, which is an excellent program. The biggest issue that you run into with housing—and I know IVET has the same thing—is that a lot of veterans do not understand what they qualify for, because there are so many different understandings of what a veteran is.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wahl.

Now let's go to Mrs. Rechie Valdez for six minutes or less.

Please go ahead.

Mrs. Rechie Valdez (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses, and a special thanks to those who have served our country.

Through you, Mr. Chair, my first question is for Mr. Thivierge.

In your opening, you mentioned how veterans have mental health challenges or different stigmas. Can you offer a recommendation for the employment strategy so that this can be addressed?

Mr. André Thivierge: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, there's a misconception on the mental health problems. The stigma that we're talking about is that most veterans—most of the military members getting out of the forces—have some mental problems. That is not exactly the truth. The vast majority of members, when they get out, even those who served on many missions, don't have mental health problems. Some of them do.

Before going to a strategy, it is important to understand and have that open discussion with the different employers about the perception they have of mental health problems. Some vets don't need accommodation. As we are enlarging our programs, many of them are fully employable.

In terms of strategy, I think this has to be an ongoing dialogue between the veteran support ecosystem and the community of employers.

Mrs. Rechie Valdez: Thank you.

The next question I have is, when you work with veterans, what are their top concerns with finding employment?

Mr. André Thivierge: Well, I don't work directly with veterans, so I can relate only to my experience. Some of them simply want to change careers, to do something different from what they were doing. I relate to a friend of mine who got out and became a sommelier.

Particularly in the national capital area, it is a very interesting population. The population in the national capital is officers and senior officers and senior NCOs. Many of them develop skills in the area of project management, so we will see them becoming entrepreneurs, developing their business in project management. Some others will contract with firms to become project managers.

Again, some of them want to do something totally different as a second career, and some others want to pursue the new skills they have developed. Many service members go through academic upgrading. When they have completed their diploma, they want to serve; they want to use their skills in different industries.

• (1615)

Mrs. Rechie Valdez: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll go over to you, Mr. Thorne.

You mentioned the cultural transition and you touched on the skill gaps and social supports. Can you provide additional context that you didn't get a chance to mention in your opening because you had a limited amount of time?

Mr. Oliver Thorne: Yes. In particular, to perhaps highlight some examples of where I think this type of service is being provided, out here in British Columbia, where our organization is headquartered, there are two organizations that immediately spring to mind.

The first is the Institute for Veterans Education and Transition, also called IVET, and it is based at the University of British Columbia. It is a specialized program, the aim of which is to make UBC a veteran-friendly campus. The idea is that for those leaving the military and accessing the education and training benefits, they can go through this program, receive academic credit for some of their experience and service in the military, and essentially move along a fast track towards a certificate.

The idea here is that it's an opportunity for people to engage with post-secondary education but have a wraparound peer support experience. They are embedded with a group of their peers and they can support one another in that context, which may be culturally quite different from their experience in the military. The idea here is to increase the rate of success and the rate of retention.

There's a similar program at the B.C. Institute of Technology, called the Legion military skills conversion program. There are other programs like this across Canada.

I very much think that is what is needed. We see from many folks, and particularly if you look down in the United States.... Oh, I think I'm out of time.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Thorne.

Mr. Oliver Thorne: Down in the States, you can see similar problems happening with the GI bill. People are leaving or not completing post-secondary education, not because they have issues with finance, but because they have issues with cultural fit and retention.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thorne.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Desilets, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to say hello to my colleagues and thank the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Thivierge, you mentioned earlier that for veterans, the salary, rewards and benefits aren't that important. You said that veterans are actually motivated by their desire to serve, just like when they were in the armed forces.

What we've heard is that the unemployment rate is 4.5% among veterans, compared to 6.6% in the Quebec and Canadian populations. Also, veterans are apparently more likely to express job dissatisfaction if they're not employed to their full potential.

Can you help me understand that?

On the one hand, unemployment among veterans is low, although I don't have the latest data with me. On the other hand, their interest in a job doesn't match their aspirations.

Mr. André Thivierge: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for his question.

One thing you need to understand is that when veterans retire, they're in their prime. Their potential and skills are at their peak, so they're looking for a challenge. For them, a challenge doesn't mean pay or benefits. They're looking for the kinds of challenges they tackled when they were in the Canadian Forces.

When someone serves in the Canadian Forces, they have to carry out missions involving significant risks with very few resources. If they're in a leadership role, they're responsible for the lives of the men and women they're serving with. They're asked to take on a mission that calls for creativity. When that person leaves the Canadian Forces, they're still fuelled by that feeling. What veterans want is a challenge to overcome.

For a veteran, success is defined by their ability to take on challenges. That doesn't mean they're willing to accept a lower salary, though.

I hope that answers the question, Mr. Chair.

• (1620)

Mr. Luc Desilets: That was a great answer, Mr. Thivierge.

I think that's really interesting. It's an angle I hadn't really understood before.

Earlier you referred to the fact that only 4% of the department's employees are veterans. Like us, you seem to think that's a bit odd.

Could you please explain why the percentage of veterans working at the department is so low?

Who knows a veteran better than another veteran?

Mr. André Thivierge: I don't know if I can explain it. All I can do is suggest theories.

Is the department in need of a culture change? What I mean by that is that maybe veterans' skills aren't being recognized. That's just a theory. I'm not passing judgment.

It could also be that not many veterans are interested in a career with that kind of department.

We're trying to see it from both sides.

I don't have any concrete data on this, but I want to thank you for taking an interest in this important issue.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Why wouldn't veterans be interested in working for this department? It seems like the logical next step to me. The private sector is a world of its own. If they take a job in the private sector, they'll have to search for challenges, but at the Department of Veterans Affairs, there are already plenty of challenges they could tackle.

Mr. André Thivierge: That's a question I would love to be able to answer.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Your eyes are saying something, but I don't completely understand.

Mr. André Thivierge: You have to understand the relationship between the veteran and the department in question. That could explain some things.

As I said, I don't really have an answer to that question, but I have some ideas.

We really need to take a look at that department, at its recruiting strategies and its perceptions about veterans' qualifications.

Mr. Luc Desilets: It's interesting, but it's also possible that veterans have no interest in doing that kind of administrative work. I would understand that.

Mr. André Thivierge: That may be the case.

Mr. Luc Desilets: In any case, you shouldn't be tongue-tied. In fact, it would be interesting, because we are also wanting to make recommendations at the end of the report and those are things that could help us.

We all have very high hopes that there will be a lot of veterans working in the department. However, the proportion of those working there is small and hard to understand.

My speaking time is up. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desilets.

It is now Rachel Blaney's turn.

Ms. Blaney, you have six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you, Chair, and I thank all of you for testifying today in front of this committee.

My first question will of course go to Mr. Thivierge.

First of all, I want to thank you for your many years of service. Thank you for that service already to this country and for continuing this important work in Ottawa. I think that's very commendable. I appreciate your working so hard to make it a friendlier place for the people who have served us.

In terms of my first question, we heard really clearly in the testimony last week that one of the biggest challenges when military personnel leave the military and move into the veteran stage in their lives is that there is not a document that meaningfully explains, in a way that the civilian world can understand, the amount of training and knowledge they have. We heard from veterans who talked about leaving the service and then having to be retrained in things they were already experts in, simply because that translation of those amazing skills cannot be carried into the civilian world.

I'm just wondering if you have any feedback or thoughts on how we can make that a little different and better for veterans.

● (1625)

Mr. André Thivierge: In the past many years, there has been a lot of effort put towards recognizing the skills, competencies and training of military members. I refer to the military civilian recruit training accreditation program of many years ago. At that time, it was the genesis of the PLAR initiative.

I know that over the last few years the transition group and the different organizations within the forces have put together a catalogue of skills and competencies. It's like a dictionary, a catalogue of the skills that are being recognized in the civilian world, with the equivalent in terms of what level of training they have and what corresponds in a civilian trade, for example, but it's still quite a bit of a challenge.

Again, there are some misconceptions about the military training. That's why in terms of solutions it is important to have that continuous dialogue in order to better understand how all those skills and competencies are transferable to the civilian world. A lot of times, it's with the small private enterprises, and this is where the dialogue with that community will help to better understand how those skills are transferable.

The other way around is to have the member who is initiating a transition being able to translate the skills in a language that can be understood by the employer community.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: One of the things you mentioned—through the chair, of course—in your testimony is the fact that there's a stigma about veterans. Often, overcoming that can be a challenge. You talked about working with the private sector to help them understand the realities of the huge asset that it actually is to hire a veteran. I'm just wondering, when we look at this study, whether you think it would be appropriate for VAC to take a more active role in educating employers on the assets that veterans bring.

Mr. André Thivierge: Certainly. VAC, in fact, would have an advantage in being able to work with the Canadian Armed Forces transition units. We call them the CAF TUs in our jargon. The CAF TUs play a very important role in preparing transitioning members for a second career. In fact, they are the service providers. They are the experts.

The thing is that one of the challenges is to get to the community in order to dispel the myths. My working group on the second career is beginning to do that work. In fact, it wants to understand where those stigmas are coming from and how it can demystify those stigmas. Also, it would be done, as well, with the transitioning members, who have their own stigmas about the employers. I

think that understanding where they are coming from will be very helpful in preparing military members for second careers, and also in enabling employers to better understand. Sometimes—what we would like if we were in a perfect world—they will harmonize their recruiting policies with what the veterans can offer.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: When I hear you speak of that, it seems to me that instead of having a broad approach for the whole country, it might make sense to have a more regional and personalized approach across Canada.

Do you have any thoughts on that?

● (1630)

Mr. André Thivierge: Absolutely. Each community has its own culture. It has a number of employers. It has a certain industry, and that industry... Each industry carries a culture. It's something that has to be done by each transition unit.

That could be a good collective project. The thing is that you also have to engage the business community to do that. The biggest challenge is to engage the community and also to develop the partnership and keep that communication continuous. I think this way a lot of progress could be accomplished.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Blaney.

Now we're going to start a second round of questions. Six members will be able to ask questions.

I'm pleased to start with Mr. Fraser Tolmie for five minutes, please.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Obviously, we got started about 20 minutes late, due to votes and various other things. We're at what would have been the midway point if we had started on time.

I want to get your sense as to what our plans are, because we have a second panel. When would we start that second panel? When would we conclude the second panel?

The Chair: Well, we have two hours for the committee. The first panel is one hour, and then we have one hour. We started exactly at 3:50 p.m., so we're allowed to go until 5:50 p.m. We will have our two-hour meeting.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thanks.

The Chair: You're welcome.

Mr. Tolmie, go ahead for five minutes, please.

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

Mr. Thorne, I want to get your thoughts. When I was released from the military, I believe I had a day-long seminar with Veterans Affairs about benefits. I'm thinking along the lines here that for someone who has been in the military for 15 years, 20 years or 25 years, a day-long seminar is not going to cut it.

We have been hearing that veterans have a resumé that probably needs to be translated into the civilian world, to maybe help integrate....

What are your thoughts on being able to assist veterans with more than just a day-long seminar, as I said? Maybe I'm wrong, but that's what I recall. I think it was a day long, and you got sandwiches. Then you were on your way and told goodbye. You were told what you could access, but you were never given the tools at that seminar.

What are your thoughts?

Mr. Oliver Thorne: Yes, absolutely. I would entirely agree with that statement that a day is insufficient.

My understanding is that with the establishment of the CAF transition group, those services will be occurring—

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

[English]

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Thorne.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: The interpreter is telling us that the sound quality is not adequate.

[English]

The Chair: I think you have old equipment and we're having a little problem with the sound. Can you speak louder and try to keep the microphone...?

Let's try again. Go ahead, Mr. Thorne.

Mr. Oliver Thorne: Okay, I'll try this again. I'll speak more loudly and slowly and see if that helps things.

Yes, absolutely. I agree with the statement that a day certainly is not enough.

The Chair: No, Mr. Thorne, again. Could you keep the microphone up with your finger while you speak, please? It's a problem for the interpreters.

Let's try again, please.

Mr. Oliver Thorne: I'll try this once more with the mike a bit closer. Hopefully, that's helpful.

Yes, a day is not enough. My understanding is the CAF transition group is going to provide services that will occur throughout a member's service cycle—from the beginning and during service, then ramping up, certainly, as they prepare to release.

I think you touched on two points.

One, the information needs to be provided multiple times, and over a longer period of time, in order for it to sink in. Again, this relates directly to accessibility.

Two, regarding any other component somebody trains for, in the Canadian Armed Forces, a PowerPoint is not enough. You would learn that information, but then you would rehearse it. You would practise applying it. I think the same is true of communication skills, the translation of military skills to civilian-relevant skills, and all of those pieces that are part of a successful transition. They must be rehearsed. They must be actively worked on by the member, both during and after service, in order for them to be successful.

• (1635)

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Thank you.

I have a second question: Do you agree more veterans should be working for Veterans Affairs? If so, why?

Mr. Oliver Thorne: Absolutely. It's difficult to see how that could not be a positive thing.

Part of the entire reason my organization exists is this: In the late nineties, our program founders discovered veterans were often not well served by many available civilian services, because there was such a massive disconnect in terms of those providing the services not understanding the experience. Having veterans embedded in the department creates an immediate understanding between the service recipient and the person providing those services. I would see that as a very positive thing.

To add to Mr. Thivierge's comments earlier, one of the major issues is the relationship veterans have with Veterans Affairs. I can only imagine it would discourage many of them from applying for jobs there.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thorne. Keep going like this until the end, please.

I'd now like to invite Mr. Sean Casey for five minute or less.

Go ahead, Mr. Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to pick up right where you left off, Mr. Thorne.

I don't know if you were there at the time, but back when committees used to travel, I was a member of the veterans committee and had the honour of visiting your establishment in Vancouver along with the full committee. It was a memorable visit. It's apparent that your organization has come a long way since then. For that, I congratulate you.

I'm going to start with this: There was a study done in 2019, called the "Life After Service Survey". It showed that the largest post-release employer for veterans, by far, was the public service.

What does that tell you? What conclusion would you draw from the facts that, one, veterans after service are drawn to the public service and, two, they are successful in landing jobs within the public service, in large numbers?

Mr. Oliver Thorne: I think in order to understand well what that metric is telling us, we need a really accurate profile of who those folks are.

The largest single employer, according to this study, is the public service. I think Mr. Thivierge spoke about this earlier. We see that those who served in commission roles as officers are drawn to that work. They have project management experience and experience working with levels of government that might give them a natural affinity for that work. I certainly think it's good to see.

Often, what's missing when we look at that data is who's fallen through the cracks. I don't have data in front of me to back this up, but I would be comfortable going out on a limb and saying that for those folks I spoke about earlier, who struggle in their transition from junior ranks, combat arms, deployment and the army...from my experience, we don't see those folks in large numbers going into the public service. It's great that we see a group that is transitioning and transitioning well into public service, but we also need to look at who's slipping through the cracks.

Mr. Sean Casey: Thank you.

I'll go over to Mr. Wahl. In your opening remarks you mentioned that two things that would be helpful are a wage subsidy for the hiring of veterans and some sort of program that helps identify veterans.

I want to pick up on the first one, if I might. I'm going to refer back to that study that was done in 2019. Right now, the current rate of unemployment in Canada is at about 6.6%. The current unemployment rate among veterans is about 4.6%. Compared to the general population, the data indicates that they're doing better in terms of being employed.

The other thing that the study indicated was that post release, there are about three years, on average, when they take a reduction in income. Their income then steadily rises until about the 10th year. That's what the data says.

Given that data, how would you square that with the necessity for a wage subsidy?

• (1640)

Mr. Jason Wahl: What we're looking at with the idea of a wage subsidy is more about encouraging employers to go out and hire veterans in certain areas. There is trepidation within the private sector to hire veterans. Is there some issue that we may come across? How can we fit this person in? Is there an advantage to hiring a veteran versus someone else who's out there and applying?

That's the point that we're getting at. The veterans who are having the hardest time finding employment are the ones who need as much encouragement to be hired. That's what we're trying to work on. It's asking, how do we get these folks transitioning into the private sector?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

[Translation]

Mr. Désilets, the floor is now yours for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Thorne, you said, as did Mr. Thivierge, I think, that the proportion of the department's employees who are veterans is low. It's around 4%.

We have recently seen that the criteria for the position of chancellor in a university have been narrowed, and the number of factors specified increased, to the point that the opening has shrunk significantly.

Mr. Thorne, do you not think there should be some kind of policy or special hiring criteria that would reflect the fact that we want veterans to work for the department?

I will ask Mr. Thivierge to answer as well.

[English]

Mr. Oliver Thorne: Certainly. I think that's, shall we say, a hiring drive or an effort by Veterans Affairs to hire more veterans. I think that would be a very positive thing.

I would be cautious about an exact target that has to be hit. Trying to get human beings to fit into neat boxes of numbers is sometimes a difficult thing, and it's not always productive.

I very much think that having Veterans Affairs work toward developing policies to be a more attractive employer for veterans and to bring them in would be a very positive thing for the department and for veterans.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you.

If you could give me a very brief answer, Mr. Thivierge, I would then have another question for you.

Mr. André Thivierge: I agree with Mr. Thorne's recommendation. We have policies for visible minorities and policies for persons with a disability. Why would we not have a policy for veterans?

Mr. Luc Desilets: That answers my question perfectly.

Mr. Thivierge, you are proposing to create tax incentives for small and medium enterprises. Are some countries doing that now? Is that idea catching on? Is the department aware of this?

Mr. André Thivierge: No, the department is not aware of this. Essentially, the idea of an incentive would be worth studying.

What would be interesting would be to examine the hiring incentive initiatives adopted by our neighbours to the south, the United States. I am not familiar with the details, but I think it would be worth looking into the research being done on those initiatives.

On the other hand, since a large majority of employers are small and medium enterprises, it would be a good idea to study the incentives we could have, such as provincial or federal tax credits, or certain incentives from municipalities.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thivierge.

It is now Rachel Blaney's turn.

[English]

You have two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to come back to you, Mr. Thivierge. I have a couple of questions.

We've seen from the research that the veterans who are falling behind after service, in terms of employment, are newer veterans who did not serve long, women veterans and medically released veterans. It is shameful that we don't have a good strategy to support these particular groups in order that they may have the best experience after their service.

Do you have any thoughts on that? What actions might we recommend to VAC to address these issues more fully?

Mr. André Thivierge: Many of the members who are released early in their career...Sometimes it is for reasons that are other than voluntary, for example, medical reasons. What is important to understand is that those who are released for medical reasons have also to deal with their health barriers. Particularly, if they are released for mental health reasons, they also have to deal with the stigma associated with that.

If we refer to the Maslow chain, before getting employment, they need to deal with their health problems. Some members retire for non-medical reasons. Some of them haven't built up experience to give them much credibility, so sometimes they require more preparation. When you serve for just a couple of years in the Canadian Armed Forces, you don't have time to upgrade academically. Sometimes, you don't think, "Well, I will get out of the forces." When it is a non-voluntary release, you are often unprepared for that, which makes you more vulnerable.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I saw you nodding to Mr. Thorne's response on how it would be so amazing to have veterans providing services at VAC. Do you have any insight on why that pathway doesn't seem to be as clear, so that we have more veterans doing that important work?

Mr. André Thivierge: We need to better understand the perceptions of the members with regard to VAC. We have to go into that. I hope that research will tackle that, because it is a very important issue. Sometimes, those perceptions can hurt the credibility of VAC. However, I agree that more experienced military members should be part of VAC.

I found amazing case managers, but the thing is, veterans wonder—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry, Mr. Thivierge.

Mr. André Thivierge: May I continue, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: A few words, go ahead.

Mr. André Thivierge: A veteran wants to talk only to a veteran who has experienced the same issues.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You're welcome, Mr. Thivierge.

[English]

Terry Dowdall, you have only two minutes for your questions. Please go ahead.

Mr. Terry Dowdall: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was quite interested in your beginning testimony, Mr. Thivierge, when you said there was a lack of ability to source veterans. We can help only the people we can find. What could we do to improve on that? How do we source more veterans?

Mr. André Thivierge: I'm sorry. I'm not sure I exactly understood your question, sir.

Mr. Terry Dowdall: In your opening testimony, you said there's a lack of ability to source veterans. How do we improve the ability to source veterans?

Mr. André Thivierge: By "source" veterans, you mean attract veterans. Well, when we look at career fairs, they can be a very effective way. We can also create opportunities for employers to meet directly with veterans. It's also about how we can educate each other. Certainly, we can educate each other. Those discussions take place now in the CAF transition units. The CAF transition units are the perfect forums for exchange and communication among the employers. It's also a more personable approach.

• (1650)

Mr. Terry Dowdall: Okay. I have just one other thought. I was on national defence before, and when we talked with these individuals who would come out, they were used to working with other people and were really goal-oriented in how they wanted jobs. Is there any thought or push to having two types of forces that help out locally or here in Canada, whether it's with flooding or things of that nature, and that are utilized in that light?

Mr. André Thivierge: I'm sorry. I'm not sure I understood your question.

Mr. Terry Dowdall: Just as an example, with seniors homes or whatever, they got the military to step in. It leaves us short in other places in the world. I didn't know if there was a thought process with the government on having an emergency task force, or if that's something you would think of for these individuals who are used to working. They're goal-oriented.

Mr. André Thivierge: I haven't heard any of that. I've never heard any of that. Certainly, it's something that...

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dowdall.

Now let's go to Mr. Churence Rogers for two minutes, please.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): [English]
Thank you, Chair, and welcome to our guests.

Given the very restricted time, I'll start with Veteran Staffing Canada and Mr. Wahl.

First, what are the biggest stigmas that you find veterans face when they're applying for jobs? How can we better tackle these to help veterans avoid discrimination?

Mr. Jason Wahl: I think the biggest hurdle is gaining an understanding of what they're capable of and what they should be applying for.

I guess the easiest way is to go back to when I got out. I turned my kit in and got a pat on the back. Six to nine months later, I got a little envelope: Hey, this is your service record. A lot has changed. The only way to improve it on one side is to work with the veterans to understand where they are, help them with resumé writing, help them with interview prep and get them out there so they know where they can fit in.

It's hard to avoid the stigma from discrimination. As with any sort of discrimination, it's hard to overcome that. We talked earlier about trying to come up with ways to get them in front of employers and to get them access to a website or something where they register and have their profiles built, so organizations that really want to hire these veterans can actually get out there and do that.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Mr. Thorne, do you find that veterans are generally aware of the Government of Canada's veterans job bank, which, as of today, had 19,034 job postings available?

Mr. Oliver Thorne: In my experience, no. There's limited awareness of that resource among the folks we're working with specifically.

Now, I have to caveat that with a couple of things. First, I don't often interact directly with our veteran clients. My work within the organization is largely strategic. In addition to that, the folks we are working with are those who are struggling the most significantly, in their transition, with mental health. Again, often we're working to get them through that to a point of employment readiness, so it could also be a function of the fact that the folks we're working with often aren't looking directly at employment at that time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thorne. That's the end of this panel.

I'd like to remind members that we have an hour for each panel, but that depends upon how many witnesses we have with opening statements and if there are technical problems. I'm also pleased to let witnesses complete their sentences, so concerning our routine motion, the first round of six minutes is clear, but for the second round I'll have to deal with the time in order to stay within one hour.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for their remarks and their input today.

• (1655)

[Translation]

I will start with André Thivierge.

He is a retired major and co-founder and co-chair of the City of Ottawa Veterans Task Force.

Thank you, Mr. Jason Wahl, founder and director of Veteran Staffing Canada, and Mr. Oliver Thorne from Veterans Transition Network, executive director.

Thank you so much for your participation.

[Translation]

The meeting is suspended.

• (1655) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1700)

[English]

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order. We can now proceed to the second panel of witnesses.

I have a quick reminder for our witnesses. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses. We have, from Challenge Factory, Ms. Lisa Taylor, who is the president.

[Translation]

From Quatre-Chemins, we have Cassandra Poudrier, Executive Director.

[English]

You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

I will start with Ms. Taylor.

Please, go ahead.

Ms. Lisa Taylor (President, Challenge Factory): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for asking me to be here. It's time Canada had a national strategy for veteran employment after service.

As this is the first time I'm appearing before you, I'll take a minute to introduce Challenge Factory.

Challenge Factory is a research agency and workforce consultancy focused on the future of work. We have worked across North America, in Singapore and Norway, and with career practitioners and policy analysts from more than 32 countries.

As a certified B corporation, we are audited by an international body for the impact our work has on employees, communities, suppliers, governance and the environment, and our audit report is available on a public website. The process is rigorous. Only 665 out of almost 1.5 million organizations in Canada are B corps. We focus on using business as a force for good and advancing the UN sustainable development goals.

For more than 10 years, Challenge Factory's research, consulting and training have been supporting veterans, raising awareness about the benefits of hiring veterans, giving employers tools to make hiring easier and drawing on veterans' knowledge to make sure we get it right.

Our research study on veteran workplace characteristics profiled veteran employees and quantified employer bias in Canada. We have published *The Canadian Guide to Hiring Veterans*, developed an employer online masterclass to create veteran-ready workplaces, and produced the *Hidden Talent* podcast, in which veterans and employers discuss the challenges of post-service career transitions and employment from both sides of the interview table. These resources are publicly available, thanks to the support of the veteran and family well-being fund.

Personally, I am proud to sit on the Canadian Special Operations Regiment Association board.

My comments will focus on Challenge Factory's area of expertise, which is the formal field of career development within a changing labour market.

We have three recommendations for this committee to consider.

One, use a career development model and adhere to the national competency framework for career development professionals in your strategy.

Two, focus on equipping veterans with career ownership, rather than identifying specific jobs for them.

Three, make it easier for small to medium-sized enterprises in the private and non-profit sectors to hire veterans.

Career transitions always impact identity and sense of self. For veterans, the impact on identity is more extreme. Career development offers the intersectional frameworks needed to support veterans in this transition.

You already know that for many veterans, finding a job is not the challenge. However, many struggle to find purpose and a meaningful career that does not include chronic underemployment and job-hopping.

Career development is about more than jobs and training programs, and it is the cornerstone for successful strategies in addressing identity-based transitions.

Recommending veterans into specific jobs is not sound career development. It doesn't put the veteran at the centre, and it sets them up with a weak foundation for solving future career challenges, despite having great skills.

Direct job matching from military to civilian environments has led us to today, when veterans transition with an initial awareness

of exactly four types of work. These are the public sector—as if that's a singular job—security, coding and cyber, and starting a business.

Job satisfaction and retention involve how roles and organizational culture align with personal motivation and reward. For example, a veteran may have the skills for security work, but the reason they thrived in the military, where they learned those skills, was the camaraderie, collective understanding of a mission and continued opportunity to learn. These key elements may not be present in the civilian job market.

That brings me to the labour demand side of the equation. Of the Canadians who work in the private sector, 90% do so within SMEs, not the large companies often involved in consultations. Small businesses do not know how to find, hire or retain veterans. Veterans do not know what small businesses do, nor how to find jobs or what can be offered.

According to the OECD, Canada has underutilized and overlooked high quality adult career services. Lifelong career engagement for veterans is a defined and solvable problem. Done well, this strategy can demonstrate how we can get career services right for all Canadians.

In summary, we offer these three recommendations: Use career development models and competency frameworks. Focus on equipping veterans with lifelong career ownership. Make it easier for small and medium-sized enterprises to hire veterans.

• (1705)

Thank you, and I welcome your questions.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Ms. Taylor.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Poudrier, it is your turn, and you have five minutes.

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier (Executive Director, Quatre-Chemins): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for taking the time to hear the views of people working in the field and for taking them into consideration.

As I thought about this speech, I took the time to talk with my colleagues and with the veterans, the men and women, we help. It is important to me that I tell you our observations, with the intention of contributing to your consideration of the potential creation of a national veterans employment strategy.

Since this is the first time I have appeared before you, I am going to talk a bit about our organization. Quatre-Chemins, formerly La maison des champions, is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to transform the transition experience of people coming from fields in which great importance is placed on performance, such as elite sport, the armed forces, business, and the performing arts.

We aspire to a society in which each individual lives in harmony with their inner nature, a society in which we have learned to redefine ourselves beyond our uniforms and our successes. Over the course of a year, we coach these people, be they athletes, veterans, entrepreneurs or business people, in their transition process. We spend about 60 hours listening to them and helping them in their quest for identity.

So it is in this position as a privileged observer that I can tell you about certain findings regarding the experience of veterans. It is extremely important to tell you about one element in particular: in every case, whether for medical reasons or not, the effect of the process of release from military service on the person's identity has a direct effect on self-esteem and contributes to their trouble reorienting themselves outside the armed forces.

For some veterans, this search for their identity, along with the feeling of abandonment, has caused them to lose their bearings. They are disoriented. This loss of direction has led some to accept jobs and then end up changing places several months later. It is therefore essential to continue to address the idea of identity in the transition process when we talk about employability, since it is directly related to an individual's psychosocial capacity to commit to their next life cycle. It is difficult to commit to a project, a job, or even their family when they are not able to recognize their own value without the uniform.

It would also be wise to accept the possibility that this support should not be offered only by military members to military members. I will offer the example of a sergeant-major who retired after 34 years of service in the Royal 22nd Regiment, whom we are coaching. Two weeks ago, he chose, on his own initiative, to call a "full civilian", a retired vice-president of a Canadian bank, to talk to him about the real conditions associated with the transition. People gain perspective by opening up to other people who are experiencing transitions.

One of the last points raised with me in talking with veterans is the release from military service on medical grounds following the rehabilitation program. In some cases, it was concluded that the person was unable to hold equivalent employment in the civilian world. The person therefore experiences a reduction in their earning capacity and will receive compensation until the official age of retirement.

I'm going to tell you about Alain, a veteran of Bosnia with whom I worked last year. This summer, I found him a job with a firm that

works with us. Alain first asked me how many hours of work the company wanted. The thing was that it needed a full-time employee. However, as a pensioned veteran, Alain was limited to \$20,000 in additional income. As a result, the company, which needed stable employees, was not able to accommodate him. Alain wanted to do his part, but he found himself in a position where he could not accept the job because of the direct tax consequences it would have for him. Pensioned veterans now believe that working costs them more than not working.

• (1710)

In closing, I urge us, in this conversation, to expand the idea of employability to take into account what happens before a person is capable of embarking on a new project or the next stage of their life.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Poudrier. Thanks to both of you for your opening remarks.

We are going to move on to the question period. Each member of the committee will have six minutes' speaking time.

[*English*]

I will invite Mr. Blake Richards, the first vice-chair of the committee, to speak for six minutes, please.

Mr. Blake Richards: First I'd like to thank both of you. I see at least one of our previous witnesses is still with us to listen in on this panel. I want to thank each of you for excellent contributions in terms of your testimony and responses.

To the two of you currently at the table, I look forward to asking you questions and to other members of the committee being able to do so as well, but first I have to interrupt us for a minute with a motion that I'd like to move.

For your understanding, I want to explain to the two of you that as members of the committee, we have the opportunity to have the floor only at this point in the meeting. We get one opportunity, so it's the only opportunity I have. I have to move the motion and interrupt us, for hopefully a very brief period of time.

Hopefully it won't require a lot of debate or anything to move this motion and get it passed and then carry on, so that we can come back to hearing from you. I want to apologize to you and hope I still get the chance to ask you a question.

I will move this motion, which I put on notice on February 7:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the committee order that Veteran Affairs Canada provide, and if necessary, create, a transcript of the recorded telephone conversation of July 21 (providing for the redaction of any personal information that would identify a veteran) referred to on page 230 of the documents submitted to the committee on January 26, 2023, within 14 calendar days of the adoption of this motion.

I won't speak to this. I think it's pretty self-explanatory. We're all aware that we received a package of documents. There was a telephone conversation referred to in those documents. It was a conversation that we were all under the impression did not exist previously. It's one that we should all have access to. We should understand what was part of that conversation and further our look into the matter for which the documents were provided.

I will point members to one thing. I've clearly indicated that we should redact any information that would identify a veteran. That is also the reason I indicated we should receive a transcript rather than the recording itself. We wouldn't want anything that might identify a veteran. A transcript would make that easier. I think it's pretty straightforward, and I hope we can pass it.

I've moved it, and I hope we can carry through and pass it quite quickly so we can get back to our witnesses. I'll leave it at that.

• (1715)

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Richards.

Just to make sure, on this motion you said January 26, 2022.

Mr. Blake Richards: It appears that in print there's been a typo or something there. It should be 2023. It was obviously this year that we received that.

I don't think we have to actually amend it. I think we can have unanimous consent of the committee to fix the typo to 2023.

The Chair: Okay.

For discussion, we have Mr. Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey: I have no problem with correcting the typographical error.

The suggestion that the committee didn't know of the existence of a recording is one that I do not accept. We knew that there was a call initiated by the veteran; there was a call initiated by the department. We knew it was the policy of the department to record those types of calls. The suggestion that this is somehow a surprise, I reject.

However, I have no problem with the tenor of the motion. The only concern I have is with the limited scope of the redactions in the motion. Therefore, I would propose an amendment to expand on what can be redacted.

My amendment would be to delete all the words contained between parentheses and to add wording at the end of the motion that reads:

furthermore, that Veterans Affairs Canada redact from the transcript any personal identifiable information of the veteran or Veterans Affairs Canada employees, and any personal medical information.

The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that the identity of the employees of Veterans Affairs Canada will not be divulged, and that any personal medical information will not be divulged over and above the information that Mr. Richards suggested should be redacted.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

We have an amendment on the floor. Is there any discussion?

We have Mr. Richards, and then Mr. Desilets.

Mr. Blake Richards: I didn't put my hand up, so I'll let Mr. Desilets go.

The Chair: Mr. Desilets, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: That will give you time to think.

Personally, I have no problem with either the amendment or the motion. What I find problematic, as I told you last week or two weeks ago, is the way we are going about things. We are interrupting the discussions and debating subjects that do not concern our guests.

Two weeks ago, I was told that it was not possible to do things differently. However, if we unanimously decide to do it, the Conservatives could table a motion today, but 10 minutes before the end of the meeting, so we can release our speakers and our witnesses, and talk among ourselves to resolve the issue. This is just one example.

We could proceed that way if everyone around the table consented to it. I think this would be much more practical and respectful. I'm not aiming this at my Conservative colleague; there may have been discussion around the table earlier.

I would very much like the way we do things to change.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you for your comments, Mr. Desilets.

I would simply remind you that under the rules, committee members are entitled to do this. As well, all members are allowed to request an adjournment of the discussion underway to get back to the witnesses.

Is there further discussion on the amendment?

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: I would support the spirit of what Mr. Casey is suggesting. I also have no trouble with the idea of not providing the personal information that would identify the employee, despite the fact that, potentially, it could be an employee who did something inappropriate. I'm comfortable with that.

The last part of that amendment deals with medical information. We would have to find a way to indicate that it would be medical information that would identify an individual. The reason I would indicate that is because something like that comes down to a matter of how the department chooses to interpret it.

It could choose to interpret that to mean leaving out anything about the subject of medical assistance in dying, because you could indicate that as medical information. That is the subject matter that we're talking about. It would then, therefore, redact anything that would be useful to this committee. I don't think that was Mr. Casey's intention, but it could be interpreted that way by someone who chose to interpret it that way.

We need to find a clearer way to word that. Perhaps it would be providing further redaction of any information, including medical information that would identify a veteran. I forget the wording he used regarding a Veterans Affairs employee. In that way, it can't be interpreted so broadly that it would leave out any information that could be useful to the committee.

The Chair: Mr. Casey, go ahead.

Mr. Sean Casey: I may want to get the advice of the clerk on this, but it's my understanding that when a committee sends for documents, there actually is a formal and established process by which to determine whether the redactions are reasonable. There's a separate process to challenge what's in the redactions, and to have a judgment made. It is my understanding that does exist. I think that would provide the safeguard that Mr. Richards is looking for.

The Chair: Mr. Casey, we would like you to repeat your intervention, and the clerk will consult during that time in order to answer your question.

Please say it again.

Mr. Sean Casey: It's my understanding that included in a committee's power to order documents is a review process to determine the appropriateness of the level of redaction chosen by the party producing the documents. Because there is a process to say that the documents had been over-redacted, a process we can rely on, that should provide the safeguard that Mr. Richards requires to ensure that the documents aren't all black.

• (1725)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Excuse me, Chair. May I intervene?

The Chair: Yes. Please go ahead, Mrs. Wagantall.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: I would like clarity on the amendment. When we say "medical information", what medical information would identify a veteran, a specific veteran? I can't imagine any diagnosis or anything like that directly identifying a veteran.

What exactly are you referring to there, Mr. Casey?

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Most of the time, it's not the medication but the number of veterans involved. If there are a small number, they can be linked.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: It's not the medication only.

Mr. Sean Casey: The wording I've proposed indicates that any personal medical information should be removed from the transcript, so whatever is personal to the veteran should not be for public consumption.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: To clarify, what veterans have a problem with is not information about medical conditions being released but their name being released along with it, exposing their condition, which this motion clearly does not do.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I can answer Mr. Casey's comments.

I am told that once the redacted documents are received, it is up to the committee to decide whether too much information has been removed from a document. However, if the committee decides that the document has to be reviewed and other information added, we can ask the law clerk and parliamentary counsel of the House of Commons to do this job so we can be given a proper document.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: Can I ask Mr. Casey, through you, Chair, to repeat the amendment? I think I share the same sentiment that Mrs. Wagantall just indicated. I think medical information that would identify someone should, of course, be redacted, but if it's simply an indication of some kind of medical information that

would not identify someone, I don't know that it's necessarily something that needs to be redacted.

Maybe you could repeat it and we could see if we could come to something that works for everybody here.

Mr. Sean Casey: The amendment is to delete all the words contained in parentheses and to add the following at the end of the motion: "furthermore, that Veterans Affairs Canada redact from the transcript any personal identifiable information of the veteran or Veterans Affairs Canada employees, and any personal medical information."

The Chair: Are there any other interventions?

We have Mr. Richards and then Mrs. Wagantall.

Mr. Richards, go ahead, please.

Mr. Blake Richards: I think if we were to add words at the end of that along the lines of "and any personal medical information that would identify a veteran", I think that would probably be within the spirit of what Mr. Casey's trying to suggest, and I think it would certainly make me feel more comfortable that we would not get a document that was so redacted that it wouldn't be useful to the committee.

That would be my suggestion, as a subamendment, I suppose, unless it's considered a friendly amendment.

The Chair: Before I go to Mr. Casey for the friendly amendment, I have Mrs. Wagantall.

• (1730)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

At this point in time, I would agree with my colleague. Unless you can give me some idea of what that would be, it seems irrelevant here, because we are obviously talking about veterans who have gone for assistance because of needing programs and services based on their medical conditions. I don't see how this would identify them, but I would certainly agree with adding "information that would identify a veteran". Then, hopefully, those who are doing the research.... We all want to see something positive come out of this for the sake of our veterans.

The Chair: Mr. Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey: I really have nothing to add. There's no such thing as a friendly amendment. If my friend wants to offer a subamendment, it's within his power to do so. However, that's the amendment I've tabled; that's the amendment I would like us to vote on.

The Chair: Okay. Great.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm just indicating that I am, then, in fact, moving it as a subamendment.

The Chair: This subamendment.... Can you read it or say what words...?

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes.

It would simply be to add at the end of the amendment "that would identify a veteran".

The Chair: Okay.

We have a subamendment on the floor.

Ms. Blaney, the floor is yours.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

We're at 18 minutes. I think this is very interesting; I just think it's time to call the vote.

I move to call the vote. How's that?

The Chair: That's perfect.

We'll vote, first of all, on the subamendment.

[*Translation*]

(Subamendment agreed to)

(Amendment as amended agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, please forgive this hold-up.

We were doing a six-minute round of questions. Given the time, we are going to offer only four minutes of speaking time for each speaker. Blake Richards had the floor.

Mr. Richards, you have already taken one minute of speaking time. You therefore have three minutes left to ask your questions.

[*English*]

Please go ahead.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

I do apologize, again, for interrupting some of the time you would have been provided. We'll move as quickly as we can and get into some questions, so that we can get as much information from you as we can. I appreciate your presentations.

Probably the big thing I would like to touch on with both of you is that we heard a lot in the last few meetings about the challenges that some veterans—for example, those who are medically released, sometimes those who've had a longer time in service, even the ones with very short terms of service, things like that—face over others. There can be some barriers that don't exist, necessarily, for every veteran.

I wonder if you could speak a bit about those and about what services and supports are needed to help those veterans. What I'm talking about is that, before they even get to employment services, there are often other services, rehab services, etc. What's needed there? What are the gaps in what's provided now by Veterans Affairs, and what can be done better and differently to make sure we get veterans to a place where they can get to post-military service more quickly and more successfully?

I'm not sure who wants to start, but it's for either one of you if you'd like.

• (1735)

Ms. Lisa Taylor: It really touches on the intersectional nature of employment. Everybody comes at employment from different per-

spectives and has different capacities and challenges in order to be able to engage in their work.

The research is clear that there are groups that struggle more after release, but it also aligns with areas in the general Canadian population where we see challenges with employment and career transition. That's where general frameworks and strategies that recognize there are different groups that need to be treated differently should be a part of the strategy from the very beginning.

In terms of the service they receive, they need to start early and focus on how it's going to feel when they can no longer put their uniform on and introduce themselves with their rank and title. That focus on who they are is the very beginning part. That recognizes all the different pieces of their identity, including their family status, where they want to live, what part of the country they're in, and all those kinds of things, in addition to gender, number of years of service and medical status.

Mr. Blake Richards: Maybe I'll just add to that.

What about the challenges with family members, spouses of veterans? They sometimes face some of those same challenges you just talked about. Can you speak to that at all?

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier: I can go with that one.

What's interesting about identity and those challenges is to understand that the veteran doesn't live just by himself. It's a unit. The unit is being affected by that change that's happening. I think it's important to consider that the change does take a lot of time and a lot of work. We have to consider, then, that whatever strategy we put into place, we have to be patient and willing to take the time and resources to do that.

What's really important is to accept that it's going to take time for those veterans and their families to go through that change process.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Now I'd like to invite Mr. Darrell Samson for five minutes, please.

Oh, I'm sorry. That's four minutes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you both for your presentations. It's very important to have different voices with different research and experiences come to the table and share some of the findings, as you are able to share with us today.

Maybe I'll start with Ms. Taylor, about the small businesses. You made the point that there seems to be a gap with small businesses. How can we improve that gap, from what you've seen so far?

Ms. Lisa Taylor: Through the chair, the biggest gap that we have with small businesses is that these businesses don't think about veterans. The average Canadian who is not connected to anyone who has service doesn't really think of veterans or our men and women who are serving. It's not that they necessarily have a bias one way or the other about hiring or not hiring veterans; they simply don't think about them. The more we can raise awareness of this hidden talent pool, the better it will be in terms of being able to help with labour shortages that they are desperately trying to solve.

At the same time, on the veterans' side, veterans don't know very much about small businesses either. They don't know what small businesses do. They don't know what jobs are available there. They hear lots about certain types of jobs but not a lot about the rest of the full spectrum of where Canadians live and work.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you for that. I think that could be a focus point on that group. There's a lot of work we could do.

[Translation]

Ms. Poudrier, you referred to Alain who was looking for a part-time job because he was receiving other types of income as a pensioned veteran.

Can you tell us more about that? How many people are there in his situation? From what you have seen, are there a lot of people looking for this type of employment? Is this one of the reasons for the weakness in the hiring process?

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier: Thank you for your very good question.

Certain steps must be completed in order for a person to say to themselves, several years after a release process, that they are at a stage in their life when they are doing well and are ready to commit to another job.

First, this has to be taken into consideration when we think about these people. Then, I would say that some of them would like to be able to commit, not so much for the money, but for the feeling of being valued that it brings to be involved in a project, whether it's a job in a small business or volunteer work.

• (1740)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Should our strategy recognize veterans who are seeking part-time jobs?

Because I have only a minute and a half left, can you tell us about your one-year program?

As you probably know, veterans who have served for six years are entitled to \$40,000 for training; for those who have served 12 years, it's \$80,000.

Are you familiar with that program? What connection is there with your program? Could something be done to improve the situation on both sides?

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier: That's an excellent question.

Yes, something simple could be done: expand the meaning of the word "training". It is limited to something that leads to a diploma. That limits access to this envelope, which means that an application by a member of the military, for example, who wants access to the services we offer is going to fall through the cracks, because it is an employability preparedness program.

We have been in talks for two years now to find out how that can fit into the right slot. We are recognized by Revenu Québec as an educational institution that leads to achieving learning outcomes that enable the person to return to the labour market. Our one-year program does offer coaching, but, technically, it extends over 13 months. There are ten five-hour meetings.

At first, we talk about the identity aspect: who are they, beyond the uniform?

That enables the person to develop their psychosocial skills, for conversation and interpersonal relationships, whether with family or with other employees. Next comes the step where they have to ask themselves questions; now that they are demobilized and have a bit of perspective, how can they get involved in something new? What are they going to say yes to, and why? What makes them feel valued for themselves?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Poudrier.

We will now move on to the second vice-chair of the committee.

Mr. Desilets, the floor is yours for four minutes.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank our two guests.

I am really sorry that we wasted your time.

Ms. Poudrier, who funds your organization?

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier: Thank you for your question.

At present, our organization is funded by foundations, including the Quebec Veterans Foundation, which primarily funds services for women, because that's where the funds go.

At the moment, we are waiting to find out whether the Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund is going to agree to fund our one-year program. At the moment, we fund the services to veterans, to make sure they don't have to pay out of pocket.

Mr. Luc Desilets: So they don't pay anything.

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier: They don't have to reach into their pocket, that's right.

Mr. Luc Desilets: If I understood correctly, you look after them for a full year.

Is that right?

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Luc Desilets: I was interested in the part relating to identity crises.

Ultimately, we want to prepare them properly for returning to the labour market. Am I mistaken to say that virtually all veterans have to work part-time?

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier: Some work part-time, yes.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Does the solution lie in tax amendments or in special treatment for veterans, for example?

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier: In fact, I think we need to initiate that discussion.

Some veterans are satisfied with the situation they find themselves in, while others are open to seeing how they can fulfil themselves in other ways, without being limited.

At the moment, in the community, people think that working is going to limit veterans and cause them to lose money. So we have to open the discussion and define the fears.

Some veterans have told us that they quit their jobs because they were afraid that Veterans Affairs Canada would see their T4 slip and reduce the amount of their compensation. So this has to be discussed.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Can you give me examples of workshops? What do you do with these people? How many hours a week?

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier: It's five hours a month, in addition to individual meetings and virtual meetings, as needed. Each meeting has a theme. At the beginning, we learn to know ourselves. Then, we use tools like non-violent communication and enneagrams; that really helps people get to know themselves better. For some people, the uniform is a part of themselves, but it doesn't completely define them. That helps them gain some perspective.

• (1745)

Mr. Luc Desilets: Previously, I was a school principal, as one of my colleagues opposite was. In the academic world, prior learning is recognized.

Do you also work with that concept?

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier: For the moment, no, because the people we work with have access to career counsellors for everything involved in that aspect.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Outside—

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier: We focus more on the psychosocial aspect of the transition and coaching. Our partners offer those coaching services directly.

Mr. Luc Desilets: If someone needs a career counsellor, they will look for that resource outside.

Is that right?

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier: That's right. In fact, in the case of a...

Mr. Luc Desilets: It's part of the \$40,000 dedicated to training.

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier: That's right.

The case managers and all the rest.

Mr. Luc Desilets: That's interesting.

I went too fast; I have no further questions, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier: You still have one minute.

Mr. Luc Desilets: I will let Ms. Blaney have my speaking time.

The Chair: You're very kind, Mr. Desilets. Thank you.

Ms. Blaney, the floor is yours for four minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Chair. I didn't get the extra 30 seconds. I accept that.

Ms. Taylor, if I could come to you first, I saw that you created the "Canadian Guide to Hiring Veterans". I'm just trying to understand how this tool is used. Is it given out to employers? You talked a bit about how it would be important for SMEs and other organizations to consider veterans. I'm just wondering, is this a tool that's being used? If not, could it be used more effectively?

Ms. Lisa Taylor: The guide was published in 2020, in the middle of the pandemic. In the last three months, it's been downloaded

more than 200 times. It's also used and taken up by a lot of service providers. It's used not only by SMEs themselves that are looking to hire, but increasingly by organizations that are working with both veterans and employers to improve what they know about that population so that the knowledge can get across the country.

It certainly can be better disseminated. Having a single point for resources related to veterans from Veterans Affairs Canada and from CAF TG—where there are valid resources that are available and employers and veterans know where to go and get them—is a good start in terms of being able to know the best way to distribute these types of resources across the country.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

I'm going to ask both of you this question. I know, based on a lot of research, that there are particular groups of veterans that struggle more profoundly: women veterans, newer veterans who didn't get a lot of service time and, of course, veterans who are medically released. I'm just wondering if, in the work that both of you have done, you have found anything that's particularly meaningful or effective for those three groups, because we want to see their outcomes get better. I am hoping to have in this report some substantive recommendations that provide guidance for VAC.

Ms. Lisa Taylor: It is true that those are groups that the research shows struggle more. I'll also reiterate that those are the same groups that also struggle in general employment conditions across the country in different situations and are not veterans as well.

I will say that one of the programs we have implemented and run and that demonstrates a good, strong connection is where the programs are not "veteran only", where we actually can be providing transition support services that combine both veterans and employers, who learn about each other together, at the same time. Women veterans going through the transition program have a chance to talk with others who are in human resources or in a company, so that the very first time the veterans—especially those who are in marginalized groups or groups that are struggling—have their first civilian career conversation is not at an interview.

The more that we can be integrating the populations and not isolating veterans as they go through the important identity work, psychosocial work and career exploration work, so that they know even where they want to go next, the stronger their sense of confidence will be and the better we'll prepare them.

Ms. Cassandra Poudrier: I would say just about the same thing.

It's important to open up the conversation to make sure we create groups that are heterogeneous, and that's what we do, right? We put veterans who are in that transition process with athletes, with people from the business world and with artists as well. What happens and what they tell us is that they realize that the civilian world—those are the words they use—is not as bad as they would have expected.

At the same time, the ones who are civilians also get connected to the experience of veterans, and that opens up the conversation. That also makes them realize that in going through those struggles there's a certain level that's higher for veterans, based on their experience, but it's also similar to that of a lot of other people, and that breaks the isolation and really opens up the conversation.

That's one of the biggest points that we have to take into consideration: really opening up that conversation.

Thank you.

• (1750)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That's my time.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I know that you time yourself. Thank you for exactly four minutes.

That's the end of this panel. I'm sorry for the interruption, and I'd like to offer that if you have any other information, please do not hesitate to send it to our clerk.

Ms. Lisa Taylor, president of Challenge Factory, thank you so much for coming.

[*Translation*]

I also want to thank Cassandra Poudrier, the executive director of Quatre-Chemins.

[*English*]

Thank you for coming.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to thank the analysts, the clerk, the technical team and our interpreters.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

There being no objections, the meeting is adjourned.

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