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Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg



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• (1600)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 72....

Yes, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): If I can, it might be best to do this now.

There is a lot of committee business building up. Obviously, we have witnesses here today and we want to hear from them fully. We have some things that are particularly timely, especially the supplementary estimates.

I'm wondering if we could get the consent of the committee to extend our meeting so we can have half an hour of committee business when we're done with the witnesses.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Toronto—St. Paul's, Lib.): It's Equal Voice. We have to be at the event.

Mr. Blake Richards: As we're hearing from the other side is that this is not possible, could we instead, then, set aside 20 minutes before the end of the meeting to have committee business? We're running up against a deadline.

The Chair: Mr May, you can speak to that.

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll be brief, because I want to get to the witnesses.

What I propose is a subcommittee meeting. There are quite a few different motions on the table. It would probably be worthwhile to have a subcommittee meeting to deal with all of them at the same time.

The Chair: How about a subcommittee meeting?

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Chair, that we have lots of very timely things. Is there any way we could have this in today's meeting somehow?

I was obviously suggesting that we carry on the meeting. I think that would be preferable. It would be better for the witnesses and everything else if we were able to do that. However, it sounds as if we're not getting consent from the committee. Is there any way we could allow 20 minutes or so to do that?

For example, the supplementary estimates have to be dealt with in a fairly timely fashion. We haven't had an opportunity for two weeks now to move anything.

The Chair: I know we have a lot of notices of motions, but I don't know, for Thursday, if we already have our witnesses.... Maybe we can have committee business on Thursday.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): We have only two witnesses.

Mr. Blake Richards: With only two witnesses, I guess we could. It would have been preferable, obviously, if we could have extended the meeting today. It sounds as if we won't be able to do that. If you could allow an hour for witnesses and an hour for committee business, that would be even better.

The Chair: This is on Thursday.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes.

The Chair: What do you think, Mr. May?

Mr. Bryan May: To be clear, I'm suggesting a subcommittee business meeting. This would be appropriate, I think, given the number of motions on the floor.

The Chair: I understand. I hear you, Mr. May, but quickly, as you know, if we have a subcommittee, we'll have to come back to approve the report of the subcommittee.

We have two witnesses on Thursday. I think we can have an hour of committee business on Thursday and an hour with the two witnesses.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

• (1605)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): I just want to know who the witnesses are on Thursday before we make that decision.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Alexandre (Sacha) Vassiliev): On Thursday we have Nina Charlene Usherwood confirmed and Vivienne Stewart, as individuals.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I think I would be more interested in having an extension of the meeting on Thursday. At least then we would have notice.

Right now the problem, of course, is that Equal Voice is having its event, and many of us are attending it.

If there's a way, Chair, perhaps you could look into having an extra 20 minutes at the end of committee to deal with some of the more important things and still have the two-hour committee with witnesses. Those are important witnesses, to me, on Thursday.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. May.

Mr. Bryan May: I hope this will be my last intervention. Again, given the number of motions we have, potentially, on the table that people will want to talk about, carving out 20 minutes.... I agree with you that we want to give the witnesses their appropriate time, but I think a subcommittee meeting would be appropriate.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Perhaps I have an alternative suggestion.

You are correct, Chair. The idea of a subcommittee meeting is not a tenable one given the fact that procedure would then require us to come back to committee. We're burning too much committee time when we have these things that obviously need to be dealt with.

Perhaps I have a compromise. We have two witnesses, which would mean we'd be cutting back on the number of opening statements. Obviously, each witness would get more time for questions than they'd have in an ordinary meeting with three or four. Perhaps you could look into extending the meeting. You could still provide us with an hour, but do an hour and a half with witnesses and then an hour of committee business. The meeting would be two and a half hours, if that's possible. If that's not possible, then I suggest we go with your previous suggestion that it be one hour and one hour.

If we can extend it by half an hour, that will give the two witnesses a good period of time. Then we still would get the hour of committee business.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm not okay with that.

The Chair: You're not okay with that.

Mr. Bryan May: I agree with the NDP.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): I support Ms. Blaney on this. I find it unfathomable that we continually find things that are apparently more important than the women's study. If that were not the case, we wouldn't be asking to take time away from the women's study for the other things that have come up and urgently become more important priorities.

I support Ms. Blaney.

The Chair: We have five more minutes to discuss this, because we have witnesses with us.

Mr. Blake Richards: I agree, and I think it's important that the comment be responded to. We've been in the middle of the women's study since I think April of this year, and things do come up. Supplementary estimates are an example of those things. We have to deal with them. You can't wait until February; they have to be dealt with before we rise for Christmas.

It leaves us in a position where everyone is reluctant to move away for one meeting, but it's required. It's something we are required to do as parliamentarians, so unless you're prepared.... I'm fully comfortable with adding additional meetings if they are required. Unless members are prepared to add additional meetings, it's the only way we can deal with it.

If members are saying they want to add additional meetings, I would be fully happy to do that. If we can find the time for another meeting this week, let's do that.

The Chair: We have two more minutes.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm fine with additional meetings. I don't want to take away witness time. If I'd known prior to this meeting that this was an important discussion, I would have put my mind to it fulsomely.

The witnesses on Thursday this week are extremely vulnerable, and they're coming to share very important.... They are unique; they are the only witnesses who will come with that particular perspective, which is incredibly important to the study.

I'd be very happy to have an extra meeting. If there's a way we can add an hour on Thursday, I'm very open to that as well. I understand that we need to do committee business, but I want to make sure the study is honoured as it was meant to be by all of us. I know all of us are not debating that at all.

The Chair: I understand that. We all know that the women's study is really important and we can add more meetings, but I have one more suggestion. How about having an hour for committee business on Tuesday next week instead of this Thursday, because we don't have any witnesses on the list yet? We have witnesses, but we haven't sent any invitations yet. How about Tuesday?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. Let's move on.

Go ahead, Mr. Desilets.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): On another matter, I'd like to know whether the clerk has any news about our request to invite the two ministers.

The Chair: I think the clerk sent a letter telling us that the two ministers couldn't come and testify.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Did we receive that letter today?

The Chair: I'll ask the clerk to answer that.

The Clerk: For the time being, the two former ministers declined the invitation.

The Chair: Okay.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mrs. Wagantall.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: In response to my colleague Rachel's comments about the two witnesses next week, I have had witnesses not come because there were three or four witnesses in an hour and they had very little time to try to express themselves and felt they couldn't. Now we have a scenario like we had in another week, when an individual came whose testimony was incredibly valuable but we had no idea what we were facing.

If this is a circumstance where each one of those witnesses needs a full hour, I would appreciate it if we were more prepared on the basis of who the witnesses are.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Let's go back to our business.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Monday, October 3, 2022, the committee is resuming its study on the experience of women veterans.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is being held in a hybrid format. All the connection tests have been done. As you know, this room is equipped with a high-quality audio system, but I would ask all committee members, and the witnesses, to be very careful not to have their headset too close to the microphone to prevent any sound problems. That's for the welfare of our interpreters, who do excellent work.

[English]

Before we welcome our witnesses, I would like to provide a trigger warning. We may be discussing experiences related to general health and mental health. This may be triggering to viewers, members or staff with similar experiences. If you feel distressed or need help, please advise the clerk.

I welcome our three witnesses for the two hours.

Today we have, from the RCMP Veteran Women's Council, Ms. Jane Hall, member, and from the Veteran Farm Project Society, Ms. Jessica Miller, CD, founder and director.

[Translation]

We also welcome Ms. Marion Turmine, the director of Quebec operations for the Veterans Transition Network.

[English]

You will each have five minutes for your opening remarks. After an hour, we will take a five-minute break.

Ms. Jane Hall, I'd like to start with you. You have five minutes for your opening statement. We already have a copy of it. Please start.

Ms. Jane Hall (Member, RCMP Veteran Women's Council): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of the RCMP Veteran Women's Council, I appreciate each and every one of you for being here in a collegial environment to uncover uncomfortable truths and seek remedies. As honoured members of Parliament, you have not only the power but a duty to ensure your recommendations are acted upon.

My name is Jane Hall. I'm an RCMP veteran, mother, wife, author, past president of Police Futurists International, past chair of the women in leadership team and past member of Rear Admiral Bennett's advisory board. I am currently a member of WREN and the ombud's advisory board, and co-chair of the RCMP Veteran Women's Council. I also lecture at the Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas.

I joined the RCMP in 1977 and served until 1998. I was an idealistic baby boomer, confident, in my youthful arrogance, that we could change the world. I left the RCMP frustrated and defeated. My book *The Red Wall: A Woman in the RCMP* was published in 2007. In 2008, I was invited to present at the public safety leadership development consortium conference in Georgia. I joined a powerful networking group of directors of some of the largest advanced public safety educational institutes in the U.S., Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and Australia.

In 2013, two high-profile gender-based harassment lawsuits were launched against the RCMP. At the time, there was no platform for credible, knowledgeable, independent female veteran voices to educate the public and elected officials on the need for systemic change within the RCMP. The RCMP Veteran Women's Council was created to fill that void.

In 2014, Ron Lewis and I attended the experts summit committee meeting in Ottawa, hosted by Senator Grant Mitchell and the honourable MPs Judy Sgro and Wayne Easter. We submitted our 2014 report "Addressing a Crisis in Leadership", which detailed decades of reports and recommendations that have identified the same toxic cultural issues, the desperate rates of early- and mid-career exits of women compared with men, and essential remedies. Sadly, our council's recommendations have not been actioned.

The RCMP Veteran Women's Council report contained data on the attrition rates of female members from 2008 to 2013 broken down by years of service and rank, and compared them to those of their male peers. It was an uncomfortable truth that I had encountered earlier. In 1984, I included British Columbia division attrition rates in a report to Ottawa, which flagged female attrition rates at three to four times those of male members.

Women, for decades, have been injured physically by poorly designed uniforms and equipment, and by being exposed to toxic work environments that often lead to premature departures from the RCMP. Some only serve for a few years. These women rightly felt silenced and discarded. Many were broken psychologically, and many continue to suffer from physical injuries that occurred during the course of their service. They often do not consider themselves RCMP veterans because they did not serve long enough to receive a pension. The majority of the first and second wave of female members have no idea that VAC is a resource they are entitled to. The research currently undertaken by CAF should be applied to serving and retired RCMP members with the view that, unless there is evidence to the contrary, the more favourable conditions and remedies should rightfully be extended.

Uniforms and equipment not designed for women continue to take tolls on aging bodies. Shift work, isolated postings and specialized duties, such as forensic and drug units dealing with toxic chemicals, create working conditions indistinguishable from some of those that CAF has highlighted. Car accidents while on patrol are common and often devastating. Physical altercations resulting in blunt-force trauma, falls, knife injuries and, increasingly, gun violence-related injuries are just some of the bases for VAC claims.

PTSD is an occupational hazard of operational police work. It is an injury. It is not a character flaw. The use of egg banks and a focus on female reproductive health need to be actioned as soon as possible. No serving member or veteran should be wait-listed if they ask for psychological care.

September 2024 will be the 50th anniversary of women in the RCMP—something that would not have happened if not for the Government of Canada directing the RCMP to allow women to join, without restriction, as Mounties. It took vision and political courage for those members of Parliament in 1970 to direct the RCMP to accept women into their ranks.

- (1615)

It took even more courage for those women to answer the call. They understood that not everyone in the RCMP would be in their corner. They did not know they would be left on their own without organizational or government protection. The women of the RCMP, both serving and retired, have been waiting a long time for backup. Time's up.

- (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hall. As you told me at the beginning, it was exactly five minutes. Thank you so much.

Now I'd like to invite, from the Veteran Farm Project Society, Ms. Jessica Miller for five minutes please.

Please go ahead.

Ms. Jessica Miller (Founder and Director, Veteran Farm Project Society): Good afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and the committee members, for this privileged invitation to speak to the great work being accomplished in Nova Scotia at the Veteran Farm Project. What I'm going to speak about today is my lived experiences and what I've seen on the farm.

I served Canada for 22 years in the army as a medic and was able to work within all three branches. I loved my time at sea the best. In 2018, I was being medically retired from the forces due to my physical and mental health conditions. It's terrible how common this has become.

I know individuals have come before me to give testimony of traumas they've endured while serving. These reports should not be our new normal. CAF must acknowledge the traumas done to all women and stop ignoring the truth. The truth is that military sexual trauma is woven into the fabric of what makes the Canadian Forces today.

Senior leadership has failed us, period. This sick, pervasive culture and ignorance of reality has given military sexual trauma decades to fester and become a cancer throughout the ranks. DND and Veterans Affairs, to this day, have yet to define what military sexual trauma is. The ombudsman's report, issued November 2020 and updated in May 2023, still reports that there is no clear definition of MST.

Why does sexual misconduct in the forces require a definition that's separate from the rest of Canada? The longer the forces take to give MST the description it deserves, the more that women will continue to fall victim. The second-guessing of themselves and the fear to make any noise cause them extra harm. Give these women the power to understand clearly that non-consensual sexual acts of any kind are not permitted and are not part of the Canadian Forces ethos. Senior leadership needs to give voice to what is really happening. They are allowing women to be harmed by those who should be protecting them.

I understand that all too well. I am a survivor of a long career filled with sexual traumas. I understand the loss of trust and institutional betrayal. It is a deep, festering wound. It is why I decided that the informal support of other women walking the same journey needed to come together. I started the Veteran Farm Project from a need to help others and contribute back to my community. I needed to regain my identity.

Our organization focuses on the healing, discovery and recovery for women. Spending time in nature, getting their hands dirty and looking at beautiful flowers are a few of the ways women find peace and relaxation on the farm. We do not provide formal peer support programs. Rather, we're allowing serving women and veterans a space to use the tools they've learned through other programs on the farm.

Our We Care Food program is now going into its seventh year. To date, our program and volunteers have helped deliver food packages to nearly 300 serving and veteran families. We're reaching nearly 1,000 individuals.

Helping others allows women to spend time together while supporting families with food insecurity. During these days, without even knowing, they are supporting each other through the informal peer support given. When women are supported in a way that fits their needs, they begin to thrive again. It saddens me that nearly all of our veterans and workshop participants on the farm are victims of sexual trauma. That is why the Veteran Farm Project Society is seeing such positive outcomes. It is women sharing with other women the understanding that they all have similar lived experiences.

The project that we started is growing, year after year. It wouldn't be possible without the funding and support we receive through VAC, the veteran and family well-being fund and provincial support from our local MPP. We can't forget the donations from the legions and artisans that also want to help. All of it makes a difference in the lives of veteran women.

Moving forward, I hope to see more local not-for-profit organizations find ways to support women veterans in their communities. Giving a space for women to explore new ideas and try different things only broadens the possibilities of their future. I hope to see long-term funding for projects like ours. We would be able to give them space to grow and we would be able to provide security and forward thinking.

• (1625)

What we do on the farm is very special and successful. We can tangibly see, hear, touch and know we are making a strong difference. It is my hope that one day there will be some beneficial research opportunities to understand how grassroots organizations can be so successful and thrive.

I want thank you again for allowing me to have this time to speak to the importance of giving women a safe place to begin their unique healing journey from the experiences they had in service.

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

Now let's go to the Veterans Transition Network. In Quebec, by video conference, we have Marion Turmine.

[Translation]

Ms. Turmine, you have the floor.

Ms. Marion Turmine (Operation manager, Quebec, Veterans Transition Network): Good afternoon.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

[English]

I apologize to the English speakers, but because of time, my opening remarks today will be in French only.

[Translation]

My name is Marion Turmine, and I'm the director of Quebec operations for the Veterans Transition Network, I joined the VTN team in April 2018.

I'm an anthropologist, and I have over 30 years of solid management experience in international cooperation for several major international organizations, including nearly 20 years in the field in a variety of contexts, including conflict zones and fragile countries.

For the past five years, I have been working with the Veterans Transition Network. My role with VTNV led me to become a peer supporter for women veterans' programs. My direct involvement with these women's programs has given me a better understanding of the challenges and complexity of the issues faced by women who have worn the uniform and the challenges of transition to civilian life.

The programs we deliver at the Veterans Transition Network, were initially developed in 1998 at the University of British Columbia, and refined over 15 years of development and research.

In 2012, our charity was established to expand these programs to veterans across Canada free of charge, while reducing the barriers of geography, gender, and language.

In 2022, 40% of our programs delivered across Canada were for women, and 25% of our programs were delivered in French.

My testimony today will focus on our recommendations for the development and delivery of mental health services for women veterans. These recommendations are based on the VTN's past 10 years of experience in delivering and evaluating our counselling programs in order to meet the needs of women veterans.

The first recommendation may be summarized as: unique experience, unique needs. Women are a minority in the Canadian Armed Forces and among veterans. This social and cultural reality affects the challenges they experience in service and in transition afterwards.

In our experience working with women veterans, we often hear that to exist as a minority in the Canadian Armed Forces, they work to blend into the larger population of their male colleagues, and they avoid building connections with female peers. As a result, they often lack social and peer support.

Finally, women in our society still perform the majority of family labour such as child care and housework. This places an additional burden on their mental health, and affects their ability to access services and supporters.

Our first recommendation is that mental health services for women veterans must be developed with their unique service, mental health, and accessibility challenges in mind. Services for women veterans should involve social engagement and support, and they must be equipped to deal with the reality of female sexual trauma.

Now for our second recommendation. There is an important difference between a traumatic injury caused by serving an institution, and an injury caused by the institution itself.

In counselling, this is called sanctuary trauma, a traumatic injury caused by a person or a place that was believed to be safe.

Women in the Canadian Armed Forces frequently experience sanctuary trauma. They experience it when they suffer military sexual misconduct, and many experience it again when they attempt to report the misconduct.

This is especially true if they must ask for help from the same institution or system that caused their injury and are disregarded or silenced.

That's why our second recommendation is that mental health services for women veterans must be aware and equipped to address sanctuary trauma. Further, it is important that independent services external to the military system and the government are available for women who have experienced sanctuary trauma.

The third recommendation concerns research and lived experience. In the 1980s, the Canadian Armed Forces opened the majority of occupations to women, thus beginning to expand the participation of women in the Canadian military.

However, the military has been slow to adapt its practices to the participation of women, and as a veterans service provider, we see first-hand the negative impacts of this problem.

We see physical impacts such as chronic injuries experienced by women who have been issued gear designed for men's bodies. We see the mental health impacts of women having to navigate male military culture.

So our third recommendation is that we need continued research to understand the specific challenges that women face in service and in transition. The findings of this research and the perspective of women service members should be integrated in a meaningful way into the planning and decision-making practices of the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada.

We believe that incorporating this lived experience into decision making can create meaningful change, which will in future help prevent many of the issues that women veterans currently face because of their service to Canada.

Before concluding, I'd like to thank women veterans for their service to our country.

• (1630)

[*English*]

Thank you for your time. I welcome your questions.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you Ms. Miller and Ms. Hall, for telling us about your experience. You are very courageous.

We will now move on to the second round of questions. Each party will have six minutes. We'll take a break after that.

[*English*]

I invite Mrs. Cathay Wagantall to go ahead for six minutes, please.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you so much, Chair.

I would like to thank you all for being here today and for what you're providing to us. It's very important.

I would like to put my first question to you, Ms. Turmine. Your program is one of my favourites. It's so impressive that you are part of this. First, how did you end up being engaged in this program?

Also, this program is not actually offered by VAC. You work independently but you are obviously supported by VAC in veterans coming forward. Why do you think the organization went in that direction, if you're aware of it? I know you're newer to it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marion Turmine: I'll do my best to answer your question, and I'll do it in French because it's much easier for me than English.

The Veterans Transition Network was established in British Columbia by psychologist Marv Westwood, following a discussion with one of his uncles. His uncle had a drinking problem. He was always very solitary and had fought in the Korean War. During the discussion he began to talk about what had happened in that war. Later on, his uncle told him that he should talk to other veterans as well because telling his story had proved to be extremely helpful to him. The Veterans Transition Network was the outcome, thanks to Mr. Westwood, and the end result was the creation of an organization.

Our organization has been recognized by Veterans Affairs Canada since 1992. The department supports us on an ad hoc basis, meaning that it funds the participation of each veteran who is eligible for the program. We are self-sufficient, which is a major advantage, as I mentioned when I was talking about my second recommendation on sanctuary trauma. As an independent organization, we provide a safe space for veterans.

I'm not sure whether I've answered your question.

• (1635)

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Yes, you did. Thank you so much.

Ms. Hall, you made a statement that I need more of an explanation about. Actually, I would appreciate it if all of you, if you're comfortable, could give a brief perspective on this.

You said that it “took vision and political courage” for members of Parliament in 1970 to direct the RCMP to accept women into their ranks. We heard a similar comment about women joining the Canadian Armed Forces. This came somewhat from the outside in.

The word “direct” is a loaded word. Could you explain to me the dynamics around a lot of what we have seen happening, which we're getting testimony on now, and why that has taken place in relation to the way it was introduced?

Ms. Jane Hall: I love Canadian history—I'm a student of history—and that's a great question. Thank you very much for it.

As I understand, the reason the Government of Canada took that brave...and it was brave. It was a very controversial decision to direct the RCMP, which is not just any police agency. It's probably the most recognized police agency in the world. In policing communities, it's pretty much police royalty. It's tied to the national identity.

Really, the feminist activists of the sixties forced the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada in 1967. They met for three years. That was the first time a woman had chaired it. They came up with 167 recommendations, and number 54 was to direct the RCMP to accept women. This was a bipartisan issue—as it always should be—and the Government of Canada stepped up and adopted and set up the status of women.... It directed the RCMP to do that.

The RCMP didn't seem to be in a big hurry to do it, because it really didn't implement it until we got Commissioner Nadon in 1974. That was at the same time the OPP were directed by the provincial government to open their ranks to women. It was a political decision that forced something that in society was....

I mean, I lived through it. I'm a baby boomer. I understand. It was a very macho society. Everybody knew that police work was a man's job. You had to be not just a man; you had to be a big and tough man. You were fighting with men all the time. How could women possibly do such a difficult job?

This was really pushing feminism all the way down the road.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: I appreciate what you said, and it really is effective.

My question is more broadly for the other witnesses as well. We are now, as politicians, facing the results of what I would call poor implementation of a scenario that was certainly going to have challenges, so along with directing them to do it, we are now dealing with—

Ms. Jane Hall: What mechanisms were in place to protect the women? There were none. We were the most studied group—

speaking just for the women in the RCMP—starting in the mid-1970s. Report after report flagged the problems.

We had a toxic leadership issue—it always comes down to leadership—and the organizational response wasn't there. The parliamentarians who showed the courage to tell the RCMP to do that weren't doing the follow-up. In 1984, a division rep asked me to put in a submission to Ottawa. They were looking at affirmative action. Already it was hot.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you.

I'm sorry. I'm out of time, apparently.

Ms. Jane Hall: I talk too much. I'm a storyteller.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: No. It's very much appreciated. Thank you. I look forward to other answers as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Miller, please answer within 15 to 20 seconds, because you don't have much time.

Ms. Jessica Miller: I can say that when women joined the Canadian Armed Forces in all trades in 1989, I don't think there was forward thinking about what happens once women start retiring en masse once they've served 20 years. We are currently in a 10- to 15-year period in which we've been seeing a large cohort of women entering into their time as veterans. No one thought about doing something proactively, so now we're just reactively trying to fix this problem.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I'll invite MP Wilson Miao to start his six minutes, please.

Mr. Wilson Miao (Richmond Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses and guests for being here at our committee today.

I'll direct my first question to Ms. Hall. Thank you for all your years of service and the ongoing work to improve veterans' experience.

The recent 2023 women and 2SLGBTQI+ veterans forum reinforced the importance of actions that advance equality for underrepresented groups, including women. How can we strengthen treatment and transition support and the recognition and care of women veterans from all backgrounds?

Ms. Jane Hall: On Thursday, my colleague Vivienne Stewart will be here. She attended that conference too, and she can probably answer that more fulsomely.

As for the transition, women make up 51% of the population. If it is good for women, it's going to be good for men too, and that's what we found. When women go into areas like policing, all of the adaptations and transformations the force experienced made it better for every man and for any minority group as well, because fair is fair. Women are like the canary in the coal mine.

What can we do? I have three specific goals for veteran women that I would like to see.

Mr. Wilson Miao: Please share them with us.

Ms. Jane Hall: Absolutely.

We will start with the elephant in the room. First, we would like from Veterans Affairs a clear written statement that all clawbacks from Merlo Davidson awards have been reversed and that no further clawbacks will be instituted. That's number one.

Number two is to be proactive. So many women were sent out to detachments where they didn't have a chance. They may have spent only a year or two and they're broken. This happened in the Canadian Armed Forces as well.

I can tell you that from the RCMP's point of view, women don't even know about VAC. They don't know that VAC is there to help them. Proactively, all women who were employed by the RCMP and are covered under the Pension Act should be notified in writing. They should be alerted about that and directed to somebody who can help them assess whether they have a claim and then help them walk through the claim. If they can send a letter about Merlo Davidson to every woman who ever worked in the RCMP, they can send that letter too.

Number three is to be proactive in asking the chairperson of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board to take a look at the existing claims within VAC for female RCMP veterans, because historically they've been given the lowest possible assessments. They're afraid to ask for a reassessment because the little bit they did manage to get, if they had one, is out of line, and if they put in the assessment, it says they may lose what they have. Their experience has been not to trust them.

As I'm told from a very good source, the Veterans Review and Appeal Board is fully staffed right now, so they're not dealing with a backlog. Plus, they know what's fair, so they could bring existing claims in line with what they would get and do that proactively.

Those are three things that I submit would be good.

Mr. Wilson Miao: Thank you, Ms. Hall.

Today, I saw the report from the veterans ombudsman. Knowing that you are a member on the advisory board really helped with sharing this experience and seeing how we can make it more fair for our women veterans.

I'll go to my next question. As you may know, VAC uses gender-based analysis plus for its programs and policies. Can you tell us about the importance of integrating a gender lens when building programs and implementing policies?

Ms. Jane Hall: It is a great benefit, and I've asked them to take a look at it, historically, if they could.

I don't really have a full working knowledge of exactly how it works. I think it's a great tool, but I can't really answer that. I'm sorry.

● (1645)

Mr. Wilson Miao: Can you speak a little more about your experience as a woman in the RCMP since 1977 and tell us about the challenges you faced that were specific to your gender? To your knowledge, what has changed throughout this time and since your time in the RCMP?

Ms. Jane Hall: It's a large police force and it's a large country. There are so many different divisions. I was so fortunate. It was the luck of the draw that I ended up in B.C., which is E division, and happened into a detachment where the superintendent was a great leader and was very open to this idea. My first five years were in that detachment. We even had a second superintendent take over who was equally a feminist. In those five years, it was a brand new idea to have women in policing. We didn't know how to do it, but we figured we could do it and we did. We did it differently, but we did it well.

I never had any thoughts on that. I heard about other female members at that time who were in situations that were hostile. There was still hostility within that detachment—it was 120 members—but we were police officers. If you push us, we'll push you back, and if you can't push back, you're in the wrong job.

After you get transferred and end up in a situation where the leadership is either absent or toxic, you really get some humble pie handed to you. I did get that. I recorded it all in the book.

It's definitely a matter of leadership and accountability and rooting out systemic abuse of authority, harassment or bullying. We're not even getting into crimes of sexual assault. I would still be very curious to see how many.... I was shocked by Merlo Davidson, that this was actually occurring. I mean, we're police officers. We solve crimes; we don't commit them. However, sometimes we do. It's in my book. Sexual assault was something new.

With regard to harassment, it's about leadership and accountability. It's the organization's responsibility to make sure that the right leaders are identified, that they are given the appropriate education and that toxic leaders are dealt with, are eliminated, especially in policing. We have more power than the average person, and we have very strong personalities. We can do a lot of good, but the wrong person can do an awful lot of harm.

Mr. Wilson Miao: Thank you for sharing that with us.

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

[*Translation*]

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

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

Good afternoon, colleagues.

And good afternoon to our guests, whom I would like to thank for their service to our country.

Ms. Hall, you talked about the concept of toxic leadership several times. Could you explain what you mean by toxic leadership?

[*English*]

Ms. Jane Hall: The first time I encountered it, it was just absent leadership. It was a section I went into that really wasn't busy. When you're in a detachment and the call is coming in and you're in general duty, you answer the call. Either you can do the work or you can't, so that's all well and good.

This was a bit different. It was a federal section where work was assigned. Right away I noticed there were only two female members. I was the second one in there. We got the worst possible files, just the worst of the worst. Anything that had any kind of flair to it that would get somebody promoted was going to men who were less well educated and who you knew from their reputation—and it's all about your personal reputation—weren't good investigators either. That was going on.

They would intentionally make a toxic work environment, like putting up pornographic calendars. It was harassment. It was, as I said, humble pie for me to realize that this, day after day, erodes your sense of worth. It erodes your sense of trust and also erodes your faith in the organization, because how can they let that happen?

A lot of women who had better options left. I had better options, but I was just too stubborn. I could have gone off teaching. When an organization does that to its workforce, people who have other options leave. Then pretty soon that organization is that much weaker for it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: You're stubborn and you talk a lot, but it's very interesting.

I'm going to have to interrupt you, because I have some other questions. You wrote a book whose title is *The Red Wall: A Woman in the RCMP*. What does the expression “red wall” mean to you?

• (1650)

[*English*]

Ms. Jane Hall: The red wall, originally, was such a proud.... The RCMP is an amazing organization. Do not ever think that I'm.... If it wasn't for the RCMP, we may not have a Canada. It's one of our founding institutions.

We all realize we're part of a wall that was there to support Canadian society. We're like bricks. We had our own imperfections, but together we could hold the wall and we could protect society. That was our job: to serve and whatnot.

Later, I realized that wall can be a barrier. It can be so rigid; it cannot change. You can throw yourself against the wall, and all you're going to do is break yourself. In the end, that's pretty much what happened to me.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Would you say, based on your experience in the RCMP, that its culture has changed?

[*English*]

Ms. Jane Hall: It has changed. It has improved, but the culture broke. I recorded it in the last chapter of my book. It's been identified as a broken culture right now, which it is, and that's for members—male and female.

It's a leadership deficit. They need an approach where there's accountability. There's been report after report from non-partisans under Conservatives and Liberals—“A Matter of Trust”, “Rebuilding the Trust”, “Conduct Becoming”, “Shattered Dreams”. It's very well known that there's a problem in the culture.

The answer is leadership and accountability. It's a matter of having a disciplined system. Work with the promotion system. Work with the education system for leadership. I can't think of the last time somebody got demoted or fired. We used to do that a long time ago. Nobody is forced to take a promotion and nobody is forced to be in a leadership position, so you have to be accountable when you're there. It's up to you.

There has to be some sort of organizational recognition that if this is happening, it's on the organization to protect the workers within that environment. They have to have some outside mechanisms. That's why our council has asked for an outside governance body. It's to make sure members have a place to go when they don't trust their own mechanisms within the force.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: I have another question...

The Chair: I'm sorry Mr. Desilets, but I've stopped the clock.

I'd like to give the clerk time to show Ms. Hall how the interpretation works.

I see that it's been resolved.

Mr. Desilets, you can continue. You have a minute left.

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

When your book was published, how was it received by veterans in the RCMP and the armed forces, and by their senior officers? What kinds of comments did you receive?

[*English*]

Ms. Jane Hall: That's an excellent question.

I'm sorry. It's so faint, and I have two hearing aids. One of my VAC things is a hearing injury that happened at the depot.

When it was released, Commissioner Zaccardelli resigned. Here was an unknown female—I was a corporal when I left—writing a book that's questioning whether there are some issues in an organization that is the Canadian identity. I didn't know whether somebody was going to knock on the door with a subpoena or the RCMP was going to come.

I was embraced. People were asking what the problem was, because there obviously was a problem. We were lucky enough that Commissioner Busson stepped into the breach for six months. She's a friend of mine. It was really nice to see that, and it was really wonderful to see that the rank and file of the RCMP totally supported Commissioner Busson. There had been progress. It was wonderful.

RCMP Commissioner Paulson liked my book. I saw him in a magazine and he was holding my book up, so he found some interest in it.

It's interesting that my book is used in a leadership program in Texas, but it's not used up here. An expert is somebody from out of town. I don't know.

I have not had any push-back from the RCMP.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hall.

For the the last round of six-minute questions, I'll invite Ms. Blaney to please go ahead.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much, Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses who served for their tremendous service.

My first questions will be for Ms. Hall.

I first of all want to say thank you so much for coming today. I really appreciate all that you've added to the discussion.

You talked earlier in your testimony about how many reports have come out telling us again and again about significant challenges. I think it was called the RCMP's "horribly broken" culture at one point. From what you've said and what we've heard, it sounds like not much has changed, unfortunately.

One thing that is very clear is we cannot expect healthy women veterans to emerge from RCMP culture when it is still so toxic and there are still big issues. The report said, "the RCMP is toxic and tolerates misogynistic and homophobic attitudes amongst its lead-

ers and members." We've seen so many failed attempts, and we know that this needs to change.

You've talked a bit about your recommendations. I think they're really important recommendations, but could you talk about what needs to happen immediately to make these changes happen? I know there has been some change, but what do you think is most important to make women feel more seen and to connect them? You talked about connecting them, and I've heard this from women veterans of the RCMP who had no idea they could get a hold of VAC. They had no idea that was even part of the process.

I'm also wondering, in the big complex question I just asked, whether you have any understanding, even from your time, of what the transition out is like. We know that when people transition out of the military, there are definite issues and there is a process, but I don't know that there's the same process for the RCMP.

Ms. Jane Hall: Thank you very much, MP Blaney, for your support on the Merlo Davidson report in question period. I really appreciate that.

I think transition is key. I think what this committee is looking at are veterans in particular. We need some sort of information at transition, but we need to start it at depot to make people aware that there is VAC.

You heard Commissioner Busson when she testified say that she didn't even know about it. She was in for 35 years and retired after 2000, so it needs to be front and centre right at the beginning. I'm told by my colleague that in the civil service they're given the transition information five years into their service and five years before they retire. It has to be reinforced all the way through.

Right now, the RCMP should start a depot. They're going to have to do all their in-service training for a period of time until that cohort from depot goes all the way through so they know what VAC is and they know how they can apply.

More importantly, we need to have some resource so they know how to fill out the form. We don't seem to have that. Part of police culture is that we don't admit when we're hurt—we're the tough ones—and that is exactly the wrong mindset to have when filling out the form. We need to have that, so proactive outreach to women who have already left is really key.

For serving members and the ones coming in, start at depot. For the ones already in, we definitely need that information given out to them in all their service training.

I do think it's a leadership issue. I don't want to leave the impression that all male Mounties are like this. I married one of those guys and we've been married for 42 years. Most members, male and female, are excellent leaders. It's just that every now and then there's one who's not, and when the organization finds it easier to bury or think they're burying that person than to identify them, that's a problem. It's not like this is a huge problem with all members in the RCMP. It's a small group, but that small group has fostered and caused a problem nationally.

From my work internationally, I know it's in every police force, but that's not your responsibility because it's the Government of Canada that directed the RCMP. Because the RCMP is federal, if we can fix it, we can be world leaders on this issue. That's what my group with 22 people from around the world.... They all have the problem but don't have the answers. If we start working on the answers, we can have a made-in-Canada solution here. We can fix this in the RCMP. We can be the world leaders we were back in 1974 when we started with female Mounties.

• (1700)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much for that.

Recently, we heard from the RCMP's chief human resources officer, Nadine Huggins, who appeared before the committee. When I asked her about support from external sources—which for both the military and RCMP is something we really want to see—she talked about the RCMP management board.

Could you tell us a bit about the RCMP management board since its inception in 2019? Do you think it's effective and is bringing forward important things in its mandate about meaningful change for the RCMP?

Ms. Jane Hall: It took us several years—and we're investigators—to try to find out who was on the board and what they were doing, and to try to do outreach. We got one call last year—Ron Lewis and I—from the coordinator chair. She's a lovely woman. She advised us that they're in transition and to stay tuned.

However, as far as I can see, the problem, in our opinion, is the structure. An advisory board is not what you need. You need a governance board. You need something that will report to Parliament and is not going to be giving advice to the RCMP.

If it could fix itself.... Sheila Fraser doesn't believe that. Linda Duxbury doesn't believe that. Mr. Brown doesn't believe that. We had our best shot after the Brown report. I watched the culture, defeated.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That was in 2007.

Ms. Jane Hall: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Hall, Ms. Miller and Madame Turmine.

We're going to take a five-minute break. We'll start right after that.

I will suspend the meeting.

• (1700)

(Pause)

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We're reconvening the meeting now.

We are now going to begin the second round of questions.

[*English*]

I'd like to invite Mr. Fraser Tolmie to go ahead for five minutes, please.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for their testimonies and their service.

I'd like to start off with you, Ms. Miller. First of all, thank you for what you have shared with us. You said something that piqued my curiosity. You said you really enjoyed the tour with the navy compared to the army. Could you explain that? Could you unpack that for me? Was that because of the culture, or was it because you were able to see a bit of the world?

Ms. Jessica Miller: I would say it was because I was in a warm, dry space and had meals cooked for me as opposed to being in the ground, dirty, and being rained on. It's not for the culture in the navy, that's for sure, because it is a systemic problem throughout the navy. However, I found joy in what I did as a medic on board.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Thank you for that clarification.

I'm very impressed with your compassion and willingness to serve after having been in the military, and with what you're doing with your not-for-profit organization about feeding vets.

Could you share a bit more with regard to that? Why did you start doing it? When did that really start happening, and have you seen an increase in the need for vets to supplement their income, their food baskets?

Ms. Jessica Miller: That has a multi-layered answer. To start, when I was retiring, I wasn't ready to retire. I did not want to be out of the forces, but I was being released. I didn't have a choice.

In 2018, my spouse and I purchased a farm in a little hamlet in Nova Scotia called Sweets Corner. I don't know why we purchased it, but we did, and I knew it needed to be a space for healing. You can't describe the feeling of connecting with nature and the healing properties of feeling the earth.

I may not be an officer at the highest ranks, nor have I served in the RCMP, but I work day in and day out with women who have been traumatized and with families facing crises who are one problem away from becoming homeless or going hungry.

The Veteran Farm Project has been incredibly successful. We have managed to find a missing part in our community of Nova Scotia, and we feel we are filling that now. This program has been going on for seven years, and we don't see ourselves stopping anytime soon.

• (1715)

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Thank you.

I want you to know something, as a vet and an officer. You always rely on your sergeants. I understand that's what your rank was. I notice that you have a few medals.

Ms. Hall, I notice you have a pin on your turtleneck. Could you please explain that to me?

Ms. Jane Hall: Yes. I'm pretty proud of that pin. It's a generational pin. My daughter is a much better Mountie than I ever thought of being, and I hope she inherits a force much better than I had.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: My understanding is that not only you've served but your husband served. Is that correct?

Ms. Jane Hall: That's correct. He retired as the operations officer of the advanced training academy in Chilliwack.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: I won't pry too far into your relationship, but my understanding is that you probably met while you were working together.

Ms. Jane Hall: We did. I was senior to him, and I outranked him as long as I was in the force. He took it well, so that shows you a lot of the men were okay with women being there.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: That's a really nice segue into my next question.

I was doing a bit of background.... You talk about leadership style and men and women having two different styles of leadership. I'd like you to explain that to me, because when we look at an organization, normally we think that leadership is the person who is in charge. They have their style. However, you're telling me there's a bit of a difference between male and female styles of leadership. Could you explain that?

Ms. Jane Hall: Police work is a job to do. We have to solve people problems. We have to command. We step out of a police car and take control of a situation. It's all about leadership.

Women brought a different reaction and a different skill set. Too often it started to be devalued. They'd say we had soft skills, or were better communicators, or were better at being empathetic—

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Or were better storytellers.

Ms. Jane Hall: Yes, we were better storytellers; we talk too much, though.

However, what we've found now in policing is that all of the skills the women brought—the better communications, the negotiating, the emotional intelligence, the buy-in—have reduced the complaints against the force and reduced lawsuits. All the men are copying what was considered the female style, so leadership is leadership.

I've got to stop talking. I can see the gavel.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Jane Hall: I'd love to continue.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Thank you for answering my questions.

The Chair: We will have a chance to continue a little bit later.

Don't forget that Madame Turmine is on video conference. She is still here.

Right now let's go to MP Carolyn Bennett for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank Ms. Turmine for her concise recommendations. It makes our work easier.

[*English*]

It's great when people come with recommendations. I think it helps the analysts as well.

I thank everybody for their testimony. I know that my colleague MP May wants to talk to Madam Miller, but first I have some questions for Madam Hall.

So far, your answers have been so fantastic that I think they should be recommended reading for everybody. I was at those early Monday morning meetings with Judy Sgro and Wayne Easter and Grant Mitchell in 2014. You came there with your recommendations from the RCMP Veteran Women's Council. I guess I was a bit surprised that you weren't referenced when the HR people from the RCMP were speaking about whether there was an advisory committee.

I'd like to know if you are able, with your committee, to advise the RCMP on what happens to their active members, what happens at Depot, and on all the reflections that veterans have had? How does that influence what happens, not only as veterans but also in that prevention part that you've all talked about?

• (1720)

Ms. Jane Hall: I'd love to say that we've had influence with them, but we've had very little communication, so...

We do have an influence; sorry.

We would love to, but the RCMP Veterans' Association works with them, and they're working on their relationship.

We asked for statistics. We had the benchmark from Deputy Commissioner Dan Dubeau, which I reference, and in our written submission we have between 2008 and 2014 the attrition patterns for women compared to men. We asked a year ago for the RCMP to provide another five-year window so that we have that benchmark and can look for progress. I would assume, or I would hope, that there would be some progress.

Two different presidents of our Veterans' Association kept asking. The answer, I think, wasn't until last week: They don't have that data stream anymore and they can't give us that information. That's not great communication. That's not respectful, or not from the council's point of view. I know that the RCMP Veterans' Association is an excellent association, and they have a relationship.

I have to say that they were the ones who told me in 2007 that you didn't need to have pensionable service to be a veteran, and they wanted females to join. The RCMP Veterans' Association is extremely welcoming. They have some sort of relationship, but the RCMP Veteran Women's Council is like a black box right now.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: You work as volunteers, but I think you're saying that you don't really have access to the data you would need around attrition or on how you would analyze retention or in terms of experience. Do you have the resources to also get the qualitative data from your veterans?

Ms. Jane Hall: No, that would be the purview of the RCMP. We are volunteers. We're not getting paid. As a matter of fact, Darlene came here on her own dime from Prince Edward Island. She paid her own way. That's how important this is. We did that on occasion to meet with the deputy commissioner.

We're not looking for a job. It shouldn't be our job. However, when we ask for statistics, we'd like to get them so that we can better inform and advise them. That's what we would like to do. We just haven't had that open communication. We had more communication under Commissioner Paulson. Sometimes it was strained, but they were listening and were very interested in the four recommendations in our 2014 report, particularly on exit interviews. We had a—

I know. I have to stop talking.

The Chair: No, it's one minute. Please continue.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's usually for me.

Ms. Jane Hall: Our four recommendations in 2014 were to direct the commissioner of the RCMP to start an ethos change and to intertwine the executive development in the promotion system into the discipline system. We also asked that they reconsider their focus on quotas, because if you just keep feeding in women and your attrition is high due to a problem in the culture, that's not an answer.

On exit interviews, it isn't just that the women and men who ask for exit interviews don't get them; it seems as if the organization doesn't even care why you're leaving. You're always given transfers within the organization. We said, "If you had an independent body that could do an exit interview when someone is leaving either a detachment or a section, you could catch the toxic work environment in real time, before you lose real people." Commissioner Dan Dubeau was very interested in that. It came back a couple of times,

then went into a black hole. We don't know what happened with that. Hopefully, they did something on it.

The last thing is this: We feel very strongly that there should be an oversight board—maybe the ombuds. It should be a governing body. I love Nishika to pieces and it's great that they're ombuds, but we would like to see a governing body.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hall. I have a yellow one and a red one, but it's not a full stop. It's just to advise you.

I'd also like to tell you that Darlene can claim those expenses. We're going to reimburse that.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: There's no problem with that.

Thank you.

Now we're going to two short interventions of two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Desilets, it's over to you for two and a half minutes.

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

My compliments on your French, Ms. Bennett.

Ms. Turmine, you alluded to the equipment used by women in the armed forces. A few weeks ago, a female doctoral student said something that shocked me. She told us that sometimes the gear was so hopeless that some women in the military just opted for a full mastectomy.

Have you ever heard of anything like that?

Ms. Marion Turmine: Quite a few women in our group experienced problems. The complaints were not necessarily related to the equipment. It was the gear, things like ill-fitting backpacks and uniforms. I never heard about what you just mentioned, but I heard a lot of complaints about the backpacks and shoes, among other things.

There are also all those aspects related to a woman's biology. Women might be pregnant or menstruating. In the armed forces, that's not always acknowledged or respected. That's what I heard from the women.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Great. Thank you.

Average pay for women veterans is much lower than for men. Why is that?

Ms. Marion Turmine: You're asking me?

Mr. Luc Desilets: Yes, I'm asking you.

Ms. Marion Turmine: I don't have an answer for you. I think the other two witnesses could answer it better than I could. However, my general answer would be that it's the same as for civilians.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Do you think that the reason women's pay is lower than men's has anything to do with the type of work, which differs by gender?

Ms. Marion Turmine: No, it's just the same as for civilians. I was a senior director in international co-operation, and I was earning less than my male colleague who was doing the same work in another organization, simply because I was a woman. In the armed forces, the exact same thing happens. If you're a woman, you're going to earn less, even if you do the same work.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Ms. Turmine.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Now I'd like to invite Ms. Blaney for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

I would like to also ask questions of Ms. Turmine.

I really appreciate the recommendations that you provided to the committee. The one that I want to talk about is the second recommendation, because I think it's really important, especially the issue of addressing sanctuary trauma. From your perspective, what are some possible solutions to ensure that women report military sexual trauma or other traumatic events related to their service?

The other thing in that is this: What can VAC do to make internal changes to start addressing these issues in a more meaningful way?

Please answer in French. I really appreciate it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marion Turmine: Thank you for letting me answer in French.

Veterans Affairs Canada needs to support organizations that are not part of the government or the military so that safe spaces can be created in which women can get together away from government people. That's extremely important. It's why our programs are so popular. We get funding from Veterans Affairs Canada, but we remain an independent organization. We create groups where women can feel safe and free to talk about their trauma. Our familiarity with their trauma enables us to do something about it. However, when the services are provided by the government, women don't feel safe because of the sanctuary trauma they experienced. That's the challenge.

I've been talking about the Veterans Transition Network, but many other organizations provide services. I'm thinking for example of organizations that use horses or other animals for trauma therapy. That's what's most helpful for some veteran women, whereas for others, it's our transition program, which provides them with tools that help them enormously. The important thing is that

the organizations should not be part of the government or the military. That's what enables us to help women.

The other important point is that these groups of women are never combined. The women are together, and the clinicians treating them have had training in the challenges experienced by women in the military, as well as in problems specific to women. Unfortunately, it's mainly sexual violence.

These women often stay in touch after having taken our programs. They establish a network, are no longer alone, and can discuss their problems among themselves. That helps them enormously.

● (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Turmine. That's all the time we have for that question.

[*English*]

Now I'd like to invite Mr. Blake Richards for five minutes, please.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

I appreciate all of your testimony today.

I'm going to start with you, Ms. Miller.

I really have a lot of respect for so many veterans across this country like you who have decided to continue your service to your fellow veterans through offering programs and peer support. I commend you for what you're doing.

I wanted to ask you a little more about it. It's often something we hear as a barrier for a lot of veterans when they get out of the service. There's a loss of a sense of purpose in many cases, and there's a lot of need for peer support, for veterans helping veterans. That applies across a whole host of things, whether it be employment situations, family, mental health crises or all those things. The ability for veterans to help each other is so important, and not only to the veteran being helped; the veteran who is doing the helping is also receiving something from it as well.

I want to give you an opportunity to talk a bit about that aspect of peer support—why it's so important and why it's something you believe there needs to be more of.

Ms. Jessica Miller: Before I begin with an answer for that, I would like to bring up a few points and answer some of what has been discussed recently.

I think something's missing the mark here with the RCMP. They have a human resource department. In the Canadian Armed Forces, we follow the chain of command. Our voices are stifled. We don't have the ability to shout from the rooftops whatever has happened to us and go to someone outside of our chain of command to find solutions. It doesn't happen. Women's voices are stifled. We deal with it. We have to listen to the chain of command and do whatever it is they say.

On the recent question of why women have a lower salary than men once they get out, in my opinion, the answer to that is that while serving, we make the exact same amount. There's no substantial difference on what members in the forces make. The issue is that young women are being harmed by senior leadership, and then those women are punished by being released from the forces because they can't handle working anymore beside the person who has assaulted them over and over again. They leave the forces and they have a pittance of a salary because they haven't even done 10 years.

That's why women are making less money. That's why women need more support from other women, because men don't get it. You're sexually assaulted; you've been violated and you're traumatized, but the person who did it to you is the one who got the promotions and the courses and moves up the ranks. We lose our job.

I think being able to be with other women.... In my experience at the Veteran Farm Project, we have been able to express how we feel with each other, knowing that there's no reprisal from a government agency that's going to step in and take away all the hard work we've done.

Sexual misconduct needs to be wiped from this organization, or you will continue to see struggling young women who have no future and are living without the means to even find a place to live.

One of the women who was with me has been with us for six years. She was assaulted in basic training. She now doesn't have a pension. She's given money through VAC, but she has no future. She has no ability to go and earn more money. She doesn't trust. She can't be around men. She can't take courses. What kind of life is that?

Providing food to support veterans' families who are feeling food insecurity due to inflation or changes in economic status gives these women a purpose and a drive and something to look forward to every day, because the organization that they gave everything to has sucked it all away.

I apologize for getting emotional—

● (1735)

Mr. Blake Richards: Please don't apologize for that. I appreciate your courage in sharing.

Ms. Jessica Miller: —but it is pervasive. It needs to end. That's my last word on that.

Mr. Blake Richards: It does. Thank you for what you've said and what you offered to us. Please know that it's valuable and it's something that is going to hopefully be in the report we will write, so thank you for that. I know it wasn't easy to share that. Thank you.

Ms. Jessica Miller: Can I just add that the reason it's not easy is that I am not just the person running the Veteran Farm Project? I am a woman who's been sexually assaulted by men in the Canadian Forces, the ones who are supposed to be having your back, your battle buddy. How do you expect someone to come back from that and retrust men, organizations...?

It is incredibly difficult. I put a smile on my face every day and I think of ways to support other women because I need that support too. It needs to be a group effort to lift each other up, because all we feel is oppressed.

Thank you.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you so much for the strength and the courage to really share with us here, but also to do something to help others who are experiencing that same thing. That's why I think it's so important that programs like yours exist.

Is there anything you can tell us about how Veterans Affairs can better support programs like yours?

Ms. Jessica Miller: Thank you.

We are currently being supported through the VAC family well-being fund, which ends next year. We do not have future possibilities of funding because we are a non-profit, not a charity. I currently have stacks of paper of potential grant funding that we could apply for, but we're not a charity. We need a charity to have an MOU with. That is not easily done. There's so little funding out there that everyone wants to keep it to themselves.

If VAC could recognize these small grassroots efforts that can support women tangibly and allow them to think for the future, if it could be forward-thinking on more support and on building a better community.... Instead, every year I write reports and I write for grants and I search and beg for money from people to support us, because everything we are doing is supporting the community and everyone.

If Veterans Affairs could recognize organizations like ours and others out there, I think that would go a long way in giving back the power to the women who have been lost to a system that doesn't care about them.

● (1740)

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now let's move to MP Bryan May for five minutes, please.

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

I too want to speak to Ms. Miller. I just want to check to see if you need a break.

Ms. Jessica Miller: No, I'm okay.

Mr. Bryan May: Perfect. Awesome.

Thank you for your service. Thank you for your courage for being here.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for their service.

Mr. Richards has touched on much of what I want to ask, and you have elaborated on it.

I am intrigued, though, about the programming. My background is in non-profits, and specifically recreation programming as well. I'm curious about the selection of the types of programs that you do at the farm and about what led you to choose, say, the food side, as well as tending the flower garden. I believe archery is also.... It's one of my favourite activities too.

I am intrigued about the type of programming and if there was maybe some research done to which those activities can be attributed.

Ms. Jessica Miller: There has been no research. This has been a labour of love from needing to be productive in society.

We deliver food, but it's not just food. We deliver everything a family needs for that month, from bread products to school snacks to toiletries. We add in creative items for the veterans, and every one of the boxes that is delivered is curated for that family. Although we don't know who they are, we know the make-up. We ensure that the appropriate amount is in there. I think I've always had a passion for ensuring that people have safety and are secure. As a medic, the only thing I did was to look out for everyone who came my way.

The food hampers, though, are not the primary focus of the farm; the primary focus of the farm is allowing women to come and find their own sense of purpose, joy, and healing and be with other women. The by-product of all of that has led to the ability of these women to find a purpose in curating these boxes to support both serving and veteran members. It's all circular. We deliver the food, we grow the food, we harvest the food, and then we pack the food. While doing that, women are gaining informal peer support in a way that they don't even recognize. They do not recognize that there is a compassionate listening ear trying to see if there's a way to navigate the difficulties they're facing.

Food insecurity doesn't have anything to do with the forces; however, our veteran community in rural Nova Scotia has limited access to fresh, nutritional grocery stores and public transit. There is none. If you're a senior veteran stuck in your home in wherever in the valley, how are you going to get fed? Where are the people checking on you? When boxes are delivered by service officers from the Legion, those Legion service officers check on the families we are supporting. They are doing wellness checks without their even knowing that they're doing wellness checks.

Even though we are doing this in Nova Scotia, I think it could be replicated anywhere in this country. It is not hard to find a plot of land, a space to grow whatever is needed in that moment. It all comes back to women supporting women, veterans supporting veterans and finding a way to navigate this new world that you didn't think you were going to be in but that you now find yourself struggling in.

Mr. Bryan May: You absolutely anticipated my next question, and that was whether this was something that could be expanded and replicated across Canada. You mentioned a little bit earlier, maybe in jest, that you didn't know why you settled in Sweets Corner. I quickly googled it, and I could see why. Halifax is about an hour and 45 minutes to two hours away.

• (1745)

Ms. Jessica Miller: No, we're only 35 minutes from Halifax.

Mr. Bryan May: Okay. I googled incorrectly, then.

Ms. Jessica Miller: We purposely chose that spot. Unknowingly, we chose that spot because we are frontage on the road. You don't have to drive up a long, dusty, dirt path to find where we are. We have visibility and cleared space, seven acres of uninterrupted space where you won't be afraid that something is going to come around the corner and scare you. That was all purposeful. I ensured it even in the way we laid out the farm, the way our beds are designed and all of that. That was done purposely. You know, I read every horticultural therapy book and every therapeutic horticultural book, which is opposite, and I asked other psychologists how this could benefit women, and we just did it.

Mr. Bryan May: How far away do the veterans come from?

Ms. Jessica Miller: That is one barrier that we are facing. We are now in a world where gas prices are incredibly high and driving is expensive. We are a province of very few people but a lot of veterans. I have always thought—and I've been advocating this—that if a woman is the VAC rehab program and she is allowed to put in a claim for her medical appointments that are a distance away, why can we not authorize VAC case managers to give the same accessibility to informal peer support that benefits them holistically?

I never let anyone leave without something. If we could break the barrier of financial burden, we might see even more women take the drive to the farm.

It's only a hope.

Mr. Bryan May: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to the last round of questions, for a total of 15 minutes. We're going to end at 6:05 p.m.

I'd like to start with Mr. Richards for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

I have another question for Ms. Miller, and one more for Ms. Turmine. But I'd like to raise a point first.

[English]

You'll remember that at the beginning of the meeting we had discussion about supplementary estimates and the need to have the minister come. The committee is no longer meeting before Christmas. There's been some discussion among all of the parties here, and I believe we have unanimous consent for an amended version of the motion that I submitted. I want to move that now for unanimous consent, hopefully, and we can come right back to the questions. It would just amend the date to December 12.

I move that pursuant to the order of reference of Thursday, November 9, 2023, the Minister of Veterans Affairs appear before the committee for two hours to consider the Supplementary Estimates (B) on or before Tuesday, December 12, 2023.

I move it because I understand we have consent from all parties to move it and have it dealt with quickly.

The Chair: Do I have unanimous consent for this motion?

Mr. Sean Casey: Can I ask for one point of clarification? When Mr. Richards says "two hours", does he mean one hour with the minister and one hour with officials?

Mr. Blake Richards: It's my understanding that this was the intention of the minister—to come for an hour and have her officials appear for the other hour. My preference in the motion would be to have two hours, but as per usual, if the minister determines that's how she's going to do the two hours, that's what she'll do.

Mr. Sean Casey: I have a problem with that.

Mr. Blake Edwards: Well, I need unanimous consent.

Mr. Sean Casey: Hang on a second, now. If you want unanimous consent, it should be an hour and an hour. I can imagine that someone's going to jam the minister by saying she defied the committee by not coming for two hours. I don't want to be in that position.

Mr. Blake Richards: My discussion was otherwise, but if that's the only way we're going to have unanimous consent, we do need to have the minister here. We'll accept what we have to accept.

• (1750)

The Chair: How about you guys?

[Translation]

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: So there is unanimous consent. Excellent.

Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Richards, please go to your questions.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you very much. I appreciate that we were able to deal with that quickly. Thanks to all the committee members for their co-operation.

I have a question for you, Ms. Miller.

In our earlier round, when we were having our exchange, you had mentioned that inflation was causing some of the need for the use of your programs. Is that something you've noticed increasing

in the last number of years? You started in 2018, I believe. Since that time have you seen a higher demand based on inflation and other things for your services?

Ms. Jessica Miller: Could you repeat the beginning of the question? I couldn't hear you.

Mr. Blake Richards: You mentioned earlier that inflation was driving a lot of the food insecurity that you were seeing and trying to address. I'm wondering if you have seen, as a result of inflation, a greater demand for your services.

I'd add a second part to that. Have you found it more difficult to provide your programs as a result of that inflation as well?

Ms. Jessica Miller: Inflation is something that I feel personally. Through anecdotal evidence of what is happening in Nova Scotia, everything is more expensive. I think we can agree that when we go into the grocery store now, we see that everything is more expensive, which in turn makes everything we do more expensive. In turn, this means that we need more funding to make the project continue.

It's a vicious cycle. I think it will end when the world starts to make sense again. However, that is just what I know personally as a woman who lives in rural Nova Scotia and just sees the changes that are happening to the other organizations that we support as far as getting products from them goes. It's just something that we have to live with and something we have to adjust for, and that's what we do.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you for the work you do. Sometimes it does require people to step up when the government isn't stepping up. We appreciate that.

Madame Turmine, in regard to the mental health services that you're providing coast to coast, I wonder if you could tell me if you've encountered any issues with veterans who haven't been able to receive referrals to your services with the changeover to the new insurance provider from VAC. Is that something you've experienced? Can you tell me anything about that?

[Translation]

Ms. Marion Turmine: We do in fact have a number of concerns on that score. Since the change in service provider, getting funding has become very complicated. When people are accepted into the program, I or the coordinators prepare the applications for the Department of Veterans Affairs. We automatically submit an application for the department to fund a veteran's participation. Apparently, quite a few case managers aren't exactly sure what they should be asking us. It used to go much more smoothly.

I'd like to digress briefly back to your first question about inflation. Inflation has certainly affected us because all our programs are free to all veterans. However, everything, including food, has become more expensive at the hotels where we hold our programs and activities. Our costs for providing these programs free of charge to all Canadian veterans are therefore much higher.

We'd like to be better informed about what this new service provider wants from us in funding applications for participants.

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards: I have two quick follow-ups on that.

First, have you seen any other issues as a result of that changeover to the new provider, besides what we've just discussed? Second, it sounds like you're saying there needs to be better communication with service providers like you. Do you have other suggestions to improve that?

• (1755)

[Translation]

Ms. Marion Turmine: We are independent from the government. We are recognized by Veterans Affairs Canada and we do incredible work on behalf of veterans.

We give them tools that allow them to do a better job of managing the transition to civilian life, and they are grateful. It changes their lives. I've seen some veterans whose faces have changed. Taking our program changed their lives.

We have been in existence for 25 years now, providing these programs that have been specifically designed for men and women. We are recognized by Veterans Affairs Canada, but getting funding from them has become extremely complex.

Better communication is needed with this new service provider and with all the case managers who work with organizations like ours. We need a clearer idea of what they require from us to provide this funding.

We need this funding to keep going. We get it in the form of donations from the public and from the veterans themselves, but we also need government support.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Turmine.

I'm giving the floor now to Mr. Randeep Sarai.

[English]

You have five minutes, please.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the members for their great testimony and for sharing their experiences.

My first question is for Ms. Hall, who's served at E Division, which is in my riding. I don't know if you were at Heather Street or at the Surrey office or both. You probably ended up overlapping at both if you had a tenure there for that long.

What I want to know is this: If you've stayed in touch with some of your colleagues at E Division, has the culture changed much from the time you left until now? Have there been any improvements? We've had female members as heads of the commission now in E Division as well.

I'm just wondering if there has been progress. Has it been going in the right direction?

Ms. Jane Hall: It's slowly going in the right direction, but when the chief justice who was handling the Merlo Davidson case had to make a public plea for serving female members to come forward

and say that they should not fear reprisal if they're still working within the RCMP, that's fairly recent history.

During that time there were a number of women, both veterans and one serving member, who contacted me directly because I'm in the public eye, and she had a very bad situation. E Division had come up with a new strategy, and it just so happened that her section officer was a good friend of mine from E Division, from North Vancouver. "It still, in the end," she told me, "did not work out." I said, "The only thing I can suggest is to join the Merlo Davidson."

We should not still be stumbling over this. I can say, as a baby boomer, that I'm offended. We were prepared to make the sacrifices so our daughters would not have to face that. It's still there as an issue, so we have to finish the job. It's solvable: We have the solutions.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

On that note, you mentioned there are bad apples. The majority of the officers are great, but there are these certain ones that cause a lot of problems. What is the best way to get rid of them? What is the systemic problem we have?

Ms. Jane Hall: First of all, I'll push back on the idea—and it's not your idea—of "a bad apple". That's one way for the organization to say, "It's not us. It's that one person." No, it's organizational, and it's the federal government's responsibility to make sure that people they give positions of authority to deserve them. It's the federal government's responsibility to have mechanisms in place to identify the bad ones and to listen to the people who are working around them who say, "This is a problem" and to fix that problem and provide a safe work-life balance. The organization suffers when good-hearted people leave because of a toxic work environment. The organization weakens and the people are weakened too.

It's not a matter of a few bad apples: It's a matter of an organization that has failed to implement a strategy to identify when a toxic workplace is happening. It's easy enough to look at when somebody who's in a position of authority comes into a really high-performing section and all of a sudden its productivity goes way down. What happens? People get sick, people leave, and that person goes on to the next promotion. Just look for those patterns. Organizations and the federal government....

We can be world leaders on this. This is an opportunity. If there weren't a solution, I would just walk away, but there is a solution. It's the political will that needs to be there to move forward on this.

• (1800)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

It's actually a very good perspective that as you said, you can see it just from the productivity of a section. It's not just a single act, but the productivity and health of that section will determine if the work environment for everyone is better there or not.

Ms. Jane Hall: Absolutely, and as in an exit interview, when somebody's leaving a section, they ask if you would you work for that person again or come back to that section. That's a really easy way to say.... If that person says no and enough people are saying no, then you ask, "Well, what's different?" It's not rocket science, you know: It's political will and organizational will to just get out of denial and start dealing with it.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Are you aware of any sections in the RCMP or any other government sections that are doing such exit interviews or such reviews of sections? That would be helpful to bring forward. Is there any other public sector, provincially or federally, that you're aware of? With your work in the U.S., is there any other public sector you've seen that has done a good job of following up on this?

Ms. Jane Hall: I am not aware.

As I said, we recommended this to Deputy Commissioner Dubeau, who's retired now. He seemed somewhat interested, but never followed up, so it fell into the black hole. That's the answer.

I guess we got the flag.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we have the last two rounds of questions. They're short ones of two and a half minutes each.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Ms. Turmine, your website points out that veterans are best served by other veterans.

Is that right?

Ms. Marion Turmine: Yes, it is.

We always have two clinicians at our programs, in addition to two peer supporters who are graduates of our programs. They are the ones who make the link between the clinical and military aspects of the transition. Because they are familiar with our programs, they know what the veteran is going to feel. The peer supporters are therefore extremely important. The other two witnesses talked about this. We use a lot of peer supporters in all our programs. There are always two and I can see that it makes a difference.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Is it difficult for you to recruit them? I understand that they took the training, but are they eager to come? Do you have to do some arm-twisting?

Ms. Marion Turmine: No, it's not at all difficult. It's their decision. We offer peer supporter training and they come willingly.

We also provide training to help them. We stay in touch with them. It's important to remember that they are veterans who have their own challenges, but their assistance is invaluable. Following our training, veterans often ask to become peer supporters.

Mr. Luc Desilets: That's very interesting. You probably know that all of us would like to see more veterans in our governmental organizations, including Veterans Affairs Canada, of course, for the reasons you mentioned.

Why do you think it's so difficult for the government to recruit veterans to work at Veterans Affairs Canada?

Ms. Marion Turmine: Once you've heard what the two witnesses today, two women, experienced in the armed forces, it's easier to understand why women may not want to work for the government any more.

I also think that we need to show that things can be changed. You're here today, and I think you could do it. If you demonstrate that you can change things, then I think women veterans would come here to work. It's only women like our two witnesses here today, who can change things. They know what they lived through.

I'm not a veteran, and that's why I'm not speaking on my own behalf, but I've seen it among the women who contributed to the program as peer supporters, and they need to have their trust in the government restored. If we give them the right to speak out and if you make some changes, women—and men—will come and work for the government. These women don't want their daughters, if they follow in their footsteps in the armed forces, to have to undergo what they did.

• (1805)

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you very much, Ms. Turmine.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

For the last intervention, I'd like to invite Ms. Blaney for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Chair.

I will come to you, Ms. Miller.

You said in your testimony earlier that one of the problems and concerns that you have is that there is no clear definition of what "sexual assault" means and what "MST" means. I know we've heard a lot of testimony from lots of veterans that if it isn't documented correctly when you're serving in the CAF, when you get over to Veterans Affairs, you spend a lot of time trying to prove the reality that you experienced, which you either didn't feel comfortable telling or you did try to tell and it wasn't documented properly.

Could you talk about why that is such a problem and what a clear definition would mean for you, and what it would mean in terms of accessing Veterans Affairs services?

Ms. Jessica Miller: Thank you for that question.

I think the problem with not having a definition means that young, vulnerable new recruits, who enter the forces with bright eyes and expectations that they're going to serve their country proudly, don't know when they've been harmed, or if this is right, or if they should speak up. There is still this ongoing feeling that if you do speak up, you're going to lose your job.

Let's be honest: It happens to this day. We are punished, and the perpetrators move up the ranks.

I think by giving it a definition, you would have fewer vulnerable women understanding what is happening to them. I still don't understand why we need to give what happens in the forces any other name than sexual assault, sexual harassment—a man couldn't keep his hands off you.

The forces and civilian life are not different from each other. The only difference is that we are forced to continue working with them once it's happened. Where is the safety to come forward? There really is none, because the second you come forward, it spreads. The CO knows and the other people know, and you become revictimized all over again.

Until we can stop that, I'm not sure if we can even fix the problem in the forces.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

I only have a few seconds left.

Ms. Hall, I don't know that I'll be able to ask you to answer this question, but you did talk about women's reproductive health, and that has been brought up about veterans and women in the CAF. If you can't answer now, because we have to go, I would really appreciate if you could give us something written about your thoughts about reproductive health for RCMP women. I think it's incredibly important.

Ms. Jane Hall: Yes, it really comes into play with isolated postings and young women first out the gate. I can give you something in writing.

I don't think I was clear enough on the transition question. Yes, the RCMP needs better transition. If it exists at all, it's non-effective. The impact on men's reproduction is unaffected. They can continue on regardless of their age, whereas when we're taking 23-year-old women and putting them up north in northern Saskatchewan for their most productive time, we'd better have an egg bank. We'd better have something in line so that they don't have to make a bad choice or miss out on something later on.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

The Chair: On behalf of members of the committee and myself, I'd like to thank the three of you for sharing this testimony with us.

[*Translation*]

Ladies and gentlemen, today we welcomed Ms. Jane Hall, a member of the RCMP Veteran Women's Council, Ms. Jessica Miller, founder and director of the Veteran Farm Project Society, and, via videoconference, Ms. Marion Turmine, director of Quebec operations at the Veterans Transition Network.

Once again, I'd like to give them a big thank you for having taken part in this study we are conducting on the experience of women veterans.

We are going to continue this study next Thursday. But right now, I would like to know if the members of the committee are willing to adjourn the meeting.

I see that everyone is in agreement.

The meeting is adjourned.

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