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• (1105)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 82 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

[*Translation*]

Today we begin a new study on transition to civilian life.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders.

I would ask the witnesses and members of the committee to pay close attention when they speak to avoid bringing their earpieces close to the microphone because that can cause feedback. Since our interpreters are here to assist us in our proceedings, we need to safeguard their auditory health.

A reminder that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Before welcoming the witnesses, I would like to note that today, on an exceptional basis, we have with us Diana Ambrozas, analyst, who is replacing Mr. Paré.

I would also like to welcome Heather McPherson, who is replacing Ms. Blaney.

[*English*]

Welcome to Ms. Lisa Hefner, who is now an official member of the committee.

I would like to welcome our witnesses.

[*Translation*]

In the first hour and a half of the meeting, we will hear from the representatives of two departments.

From the Department of National Defence, we have with us Commodore Daniel Bouchard, commander of the Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group.

From the Department of Veterans Affairs, we welcome Steven Harris, assistant deputy minister, service delivery branch; Jane Hicks, acting director general, service delivery and program management; and Mark Roy, area director central Ontario.

Each of the two departments will have five minutes for its introductory remarks, after which the members will ask questions.

We will begin with the Department of National Defence. Mr. Bouchard, you have the floor for five minutes.

Commodore Daniel Bouchard (Commander, Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group, Canadian Armed Forces, Department of National Defence): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My name is Commodore Daniel Bouchard, commander of the Canadian Armed Forces Transition Group.

I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered here on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabeg Nation, and to take this opportunity to remind myself, and everyone here with me, of our commitment to meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous leaders and people across the land.

I want to begin by thanking the committee for your interest in better understanding the transition process and support that we provide to our members as they make the important decision to take off their uniform. This is an important topic because first and foremost, we have a duty to take care of our people who put service to Canada before self.

[*English*]

As the commander of the Canadian Armed Forces transition group within chief military personnel, I can assure you that I am committed to ensuring our members receive the supports they need during this important life change. More specifically, within the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, I'm responsible for military career transition, which provides services to serving or retired members; healthy, ill and injured members; and families of a deceased member.

Given the unique nature of our jobs, sometimes our members become significantly ill or injured. Whether their injury is physical or mental, they may require enhanced support through a return-to-work program or a transition within the Canadian Armed Forces or to post-military life. That is one of the reasons why "Strong, Secure, Engaged" in 2017 directed us to create the Canadian Armed Forces transition group. My organization delivers personalized, professional and standardized casualty support and transition services to Canadian Armed Forces members and their families to enable seamless transition and enhance well-being. This includes special attention to those who are ill and injured personnel, their families and the families of the deceased.

I am proud to inform you that the transition group will be reaching full operational capability by 1 April, 2024, becoming the default transition process for all regular force members transitioning out of the military. We are currently in the process of extending our services to members of the primary reserves, cadet organizations, administration and training service, and rangers. That means that all the 27 transition centres located across the country will integrate one-stop centres where releasing members and their families can use the applicable services we offer, delivered by trained professional staff, who will offer a personalized transition experience to each member.

We recognize that each individual of the Canadian Armed Forces has their own unique experience and identity factors that need to be considered. That is why we have a tailored transition process that is founded upon the seven domains of well-being, which are purpose, finances, health, social integration, life skills, housing and physical environment, and cultural and social environment.

In addition, we have also developed and implemented several digital tools in support of transitioning members and their families, which are available at the “Digital Transition Centre” and can be accessed via the Internet at Canada.ca, military career transition. These include a transition app; “My Transition 101” training; a skills and education translator; the second career assistance network, which is available online; and “My Transition Guide: Transitioning from Military to Civilian Life”.

Among the many resources, I want to highlight the three key programs that we deliver to help support CAF members, veterans and their families.

There's the operational stress injury social support program, also known as OSISS, which provides peer support to CAF members, veterans and their families who are living with an operational stress injury.

Next is the helping our peers by providing empathy program, also known as HOPE, which supports our members and military families who have lost a loved one. With continuous peer support and education on grief, the program helps bereaved individuals to better understand and provide coping strategies during the process of grief unique to our profession.

Finally, Solider On, is a Canadian Forces morale and welfare services program that contributes to the recovery of ill and injured members and veterans by providing opportunities and resources through sport, recreational and creative activities.

These are just a few examples of the great work that my organization is doing, in close collaboration with Veterans Affairs Canada and our valued partners, to ensure our members and their families are informed, prepared and empowered for a successful transition. Our members give their best to Canada, as each of us is sworn to do. That is why the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces is committed to ensuring that our members have a seamless transition experience and have the supports they need to navigate this important career and life change.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

• (1110)

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

Right now, let's get to Mr. Harris for five minutes please.

Go ahead.

Mr. Steven Harris (Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery Branch, Department of Veterans Affairs): Good morning and thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for inviting us to appear today on the important topic of transition.

I am Steven Harris. I'm the assistant deputy minister for service delivery, and I'm joined today by my colleagues Jane Hicks, director general, and Mark Roy, area director.

As you well know, transition is the process of change from military to post-service life. On average, 8,200 Canadian Armed Forces members, both regular force and primary reserves, transition to life after service each year. While every member will experience transition, the experience is not the same for every member. No matter the length of service, rank or reasons for releasing, it is a major life event that comes with strong emotions, both positive and negative, and some degree of challenge and stress.

A successful transition to civilian life is dependent on many factors, including health, financial security, housing, community integration, identity, and employment or other purposeful activity.

[*Translation*]

At a departmental forum that we organized in 2022, one veteran explained the challenges he faced in transitioning and looking for meaningful employment. He accurately summed it all up when he said that, when members are in service, the mission is always number one, but when those members transition to civilian life, they become the mission.

According to the study on post-military life published in 2019, 39% of veterans reported that they had had trouble adjusting to civilian life following their service. Those who are released for medical reasons are twice as likely to report experiencing issues during and after their transition as those who leave the forces voluntarily or who are released at the end of their period of service.

[*English*]

This is why we've committed our efforts to reduce the complexity of the transition process while enhancing the well-being of CAF and RCMP members and veterans and their families. Since 2015, VAC and CAF have been offering enhanced transition services to medically releasing members. As part of these enhanced services, we engage earlier with medically releasing members and their families to provide coordinated and integrated support.

Early intervention is key and is of critical importance in a successful transition process. Through this enhanced process, VAC has increased its participation in service to medically releasing members during their pre-release stage of transition.

In 2019, in co-operation with the Canadian Armed Forces, we designed a joint military-to-civilian transition process for non-medically releasing members and their families. As part of this process, transitioning members are supported by both the Canadian Armed Forces transition officers and advisers and Veterans Affairs staff, who jointly help provide assistance in transition planning. The new approach was being trialled at Canadian Forces Base Borden in 2019 and then at Base Petawawa in 2021. It is now being implemented nationally and will be fully operational by the end of 2024.

[Translation]

In addition, the Department of Veterans Affairs provides 27 full-time or part-time staffed transition centres on Canadian Armed Forces bases and squadrons across the country. At all those centres, the department offers transition planning services, including transition interviews and awareness and training seminars.

In a transition interview, departmental staff provide releasing members with advice on how to file applications for programs, establish connections among members and support them in accordance with their needs.

[English]

The Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs transition centre staff conduct briefings on each base and have face-to-face meetings and seminars with Canadian Armed Forces members who are considering transition. This helps to provide important information on Veterans Affairs benefits and services, as well as information on services offered by other organizations. Transition training is available online in the form of My Transition 101, which is recommended for all releasing members and covers a diverse range of topics.

[Translation]

In addition to these joint initiatives, Veterans Affairs Canada offers various benefits and services to assist releasing members with their transition.

For example, the veteran family program offers medically releasing veterans and their families continued access to the military family resource centres and to a suite of programs, courses and group sessions. Other benefits and services offered include disability benefits designed to recognize and compensate members and veterans for service-related injuries.

We also provide rehabilitation and professional assistance services as well as an income replacement benefit that provides 90% of pre-release pay while veterans are in the rehabilitation program.

• (1115)

[English]

Another important component of our work is our focus on education and employment. Our education and training benefit provides funding for veterans to pursue education and training that will support them in a successful transition, help them to achieve their edu-

cation and post-military employment goals, and better position them to be more competitive in the civilian workplace.

We also offer career transition services that include help with career counselling, résumé writing and job search assistance. In collaboration with the Canadian Armed Forces transition group, ESDC and the employment group's job bank, veterans can search a job bank specific to them to help find a new career.

Veterans Affairs has used LinkedIn. The group has approximately 5,000 members and has generated an average of 8,700 quarterly engagements as well as a series of webinars to provide direct connections and employment opportunities. They've attracted 2,000 to 3,000 veterans and transitioning members.

Veterans Affairs continues to improve service delivery by enhancing digital tools and increasing early registration. Our objective is to deliver standardized, personalized and professional transition support that empowers Canadian Armed Forces veterans and Royal Canadian Mounted Police members and their families after the transition.

Thank you very much. We look forward to your questions.

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

I would also like to welcome the veterans in the room, because we have a few here.

We're going to start the first round of questions of six minutes each.

I invite MP Terry Dowdall to take his six minutes, please.

Mr. Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to take the opportunity to thank our witnesses here today. Those who have served receive a special thanks.

I'm happy that we're here today trying to help our veterans transition and move on in their lives.

I've had the opportunity—I know I'm new to this committee—to read “A Seamless Transition to Civilian Life For All Veterans: It's Time For Action”. They did the same kind of study in 2018. I'm curious to know some of the recommendations and some of the responses that came through at that time, where we are today and how it's moving forward. I'm glad to hear about the transition group in 2024. It's been six years, pretty much.

The government launched Canada's first-ever national housing strategy in November 2017—this is in the study—recognizing that housing is a key aspect of building an inclusive society and providing economic security for all Canadians and those in the military.

We have had many people reach out to my office—and, I know, to other members' offices—who are homeless at this particular moment in time. I'm wondering what exactly the government is doing to help those individuals ASAP, and how many veterans are homeless, if you have a number.

Mr. Steven Harris: Thanks very much for the question.

Perhaps I can start. I would certainly invite my colleagues and Commodore Bouchard to offer some observations as well.

With respect to homelessness, a veteran homelessness program has been announced. It's in development with our partners at Infrastructure Canada, building on the national housing strategy that we put in place.

Mr. Terry Dowdall: Do you have a rough timeline, though, because we're in somewhat of a crisis?

Mr. Steven Harris: It's not my program specifically, but my understanding is that it will be within the next couple of months. It was announced and is under way in terms of the preparations to launch the program, so it should be launched in the next few months.

That program will help by providing rent subsidies for veterans who are either at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness. That's an excellent new addition to a program that will help anyone who's facing the issue of homelessness at this point in time, because we have not previously—in the government, and certainly not within Veterans Affairs—had access to a rent subsidy program.

We have some temporary measures that are available to help veterans who may be experiencing or who are at risk of homelessness. We have a veterans emergency fund that veterans and their families can access in case of emergencies that may find them out of safe housing or lead to them being out of safe housing. Those are some temporary measures.

We have a number of income replacement benefits that help support veterans by providing financial security, but there's nothing specific for housing and homelessness. In this case, the rent subsidy program that's coming into effect will be very helpful for our staff in terms of helping veterans and for helping veterans themselves.

Mr. Terry Dowdall: Don't you think, though, that should be one of the top issues at this time, and there should be some real hard timelines to make sure that opportunity...?

How many veterans are homeless at this particular moment in time? Do you know?

• (1120)

Mr. Steven Harris: There are a variety of estimates that exist for homelessness with respect to veterans. Somewhere between 2,000 and 4,000 is usually an estimate that's used.

Mr. Terry Dowdall: It's quite a gap.

Mr. Steven Harris: It's because of the difficulty in trying to count the number of veterans for self-identification purposes. In

other words, it's the veterans identifying themselves as part of the counts that take place in institutions that are helping homeless people, such as outreach centres that are helping homeless individuals.

Sometimes veterans identify themselves. Sometimes they don't. That makes it a bit more difficult.

Mr. Terry Dowdall: Do you think it has gotten better or worse since we've recognized this issue?

Mr. Steven Harris: I think some of the circumstances globally and within the country have changed to make housing more difficult. It's certainly not hard to look at the news and find that housing is a main struggle for individuals across the country, be they veterans or not.

I think the challenges that exist with respect to housing across the country are affecting veterans as equally as they may affect others in these cases. In terms of whether it's getting better or not, I think the new veteran homelessness program will be significant in helping veterans be able to access rent subsidies and be able to find actual housing in the areas they are choosing to live.

Mr. Terry Dowdall: Recommendation 15, was to better “harmonize treatment options offered by healthcare professionals to transitioning serving members and veterans”. We have heard from many veterans that this doesn't seem to be the case. It's one of the common issues that have been brought to light since I have been here.

Has there been any improvement on that since 2018?

Mr. Steven Harris: If you may, I might ask Jane and the commodore to weigh in on those two issues.

Ms. Jane Hicks (Acting Director General, Service Delivery and Program Management, Department of Veterans Affairs): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There is an alignment of treatment benefits programs between the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs, whereby members who have a service-related condition can let us know, and they can contact our provider Medavie Blue Cross and request their treatment benefits so that when they release we ensure their treatment benefits are aligned. If there are any discrepancies, they can let us now and we can work with veterans to determine the way forward for those who need it.

In addition, for those who need a doctor, when they're releasing we have a telemedicine service for one year post-transition to allow members to transition from the Canadian Armed Forces to the Canadian health care system.

Mr. Terry Dowdall: I don't know why we're getting so many people coming forward. I don't know if it's confusion or what it is, but from what I'm experiencing here in the committee, it doesn't seem to be improving at all. I don't know if you want to look at, as I said, the 2018 report.

Are there metrics that we have on some of the suggestions there? You came back with your government response and said you would monitor some of these issues. It doesn't seem like there are a whole lot of numbers for a lot of the questions that we often ask here, like how many veterans are...? For any of the questions we have, it doesn't seem like we get numbers very often. I just don't know why that is.

Why don't we get numbers when we're looking at all these reports all the time? It says, "We're going to work on it. We're going to try. We have a new committee going out." Whatever you're looking at trying to solve, there should be numbers that show we are moving ahead and we are becoming more successful. I don't see those.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds if you want to answer.

Ms. Jane Hicks: Certainly, data is a challenge. There's no question, but we do have data on telemedicine and some data on the number of individuals who are accessing alignment of benefits. Again, awareness is a challenge, and we recognize that not everyone is aware of that. That's why, with our work on transition services, early intervention is key in trying to let members know what's available to them, how to access it and what their benefits and services are.

Mr. Terry Dowdall: There seems to be a lack of communication, sometimes—that's how it seems.

The Chair: Mr. Dowdall, I'm sorry, but we have to move on.

Now I invite MP Randeep Sarai to go ahead for six minutes, please.

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

We heard a lot about the importance of ensuring that the transition to life after service is as smooth as possible. Can you talk about the new military-to-civilian transition process?

Maybe I'll start with you, Mr. Harris, or anyone on the panel.

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: The new military-to-civilian transition process is working with our partners to deliver a professional and standardized but also personalized transition for all of our members and also their families. It's putting them at the centre of the transition process. It's a five-step process that goes from when you make that decision and understanding your decision to transition, to preparing a plan—as in all of our missions in the military, the plan is very important—to undergoing the training for it, to the execution of the actual transition process, during which time you can adjust the plan accordingly, and then to a successful transition to civilian life. It's done across the seven domains of well-being to facilitate that planning process and to establish the plan itself and the mitigating factors when there are some issues that need to be looked after.

• (1125)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Go ahead, Mr. Roy.

Mr. Mark Roy (Area Director Central Ontario, Department of Veterans Affairs): From a Veterans Affairs perspective, we work hand in hand with our colleagues at the Canadian Armed Forces as a part of the continuum of transition. When we start

working with members at the time they are transitioning, we work with them to identify any potential benefits or services they may need when they move on to civilian life. At the same time, we also work with them to identify any potential risks or potential barriers to transition that may impact them.

At that point, that's when one of our veterans service agents may work with them to offer benefits and services. If we find we are going to need more hands-on work with the veteran, we'll then offer case management services so that we can ensure the transition is smooth and that the veteran receives the services and benefits they need in an opportune time.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: How is the new transition process different from the services that Veterans Affairs was previously providing to support transition?

Ms. Jane Hicks: Thank you for your question.

The main difference, I think, is that previously the focus on transition was really on the ill and injured, and also others but not in such a formalized way. Right now, it's all those releasing, so it includes the ill and injured and those who are non-medically releasing. That is the biggest difference.

Depending on the year, roughly 75% to 80% are non-medical releases. It's a more coordinated approach. We get systematically notified when members are releasing. With the stand-up of the transition centres and transition advisers, VAC staff are co-located in teams at the transition centres. It's a much more coordinated approach than in the past.

Then there's some post-release follow-up that wasn't in place before.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

I also think there's a gap for those non-medically releasing, and you just were alluding to Canadian Armed Forces members who underwent a largely administrative process without support. Is the new military disability and transition process addressing the gap, and if so, how?

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: Thank you very much for the question.

It's really by working closely, as Ms. Hicks mentioned, with the transition adviser. With the newly established process for the transition advisers, they will develop the plan for the members and their families to be in a better position to assess that transition process.

The transition advisers will also ensure that the members and their families know what services are available to them. As we've standardized the process, we're also learning from best practices, and we're sharing those across Canada under one unity of command, allowing the process to get better across the 27 transition centres.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Then there's data and information shared between the 27 centres.

My next question is in terms of spouses. Are spouses given transition assistance when members are going from CAF duty to being a veteran? If so, is there any vocational programming for them? What kinds of transitional services would spouses and their families get?

Ms. Jane Hicks: In terms of spouses, I think it all starts with transition and the transition process. The information at the transition interviews is intended for the military members and their families or spouses, so they're certainly welcome to attend and participate in the process. Then they can attend the transition interviews. If members, when they're releasing, are not able to access rehabilitation, for example, then a spouse may participate in the vocational assistance program.

We also have career transition services that are available for serving members and their families, veterans and spouses. That is for pre-release and post-release, so it can assist with job-finding assistance, résumé writing and things like that. As veterans or members are moving across the country, sometimes they need that extra assistance, so that is available. The uptake is still primarily veterans or members, and a smaller proportion of spouses access the program.

• (1130)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

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

[Translation]

I now turn the floor over to Luc Desilets for the next six minutes.

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

Good afternoon to my colleagues and thanks to the witnesses for being here and submitting to our torture chamber.

Mr. Harris, you said that 30% of veterans transitioning to civilian life have difficulty adjusting and that twice as many experience mental health or psychological problems.

However, those aren't exactly the figures that the Library of Parliament has provided. It reports that 60% of veterans releasing for non-medical reasons have difficulties during their transition. So we can assume that even more experience difficulties for medical reasons.

How do you explain this percentage discrepancy?

Mr. Steven Harris: First of all, I said that 39% of releasing veterans report that they're having difficulties.

I'm not familiar with the study that the library submitted, but I can tell you that, according to a study conducted by Veterans Affairs Canada, and which I believe contains absolutely accurate data, approximately 40% report that they are having difficulties.

You're right in saying that the difficulties veterans experience aren't always medical in nature. They may be related to veterans' employment searches or the way they're adjusting to civilian life in general as they seek a new path. Medical difficulties aren't always the biggest problems for them. The issue may simply be a very big life change.

Mr. Luc Desilets: I sense you're going to take up all of my six minutes.

Would you agree with me that transition is distressing for far more than 39% of veterans?

Mr. Steven Harris: I don't think it's distressing for them, but they may find it difficult.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Do you think that's true of more than 39% of people?

Mr. Steven Harris: I don't know. I can only refer to the survey that I've seen. I don't know the numbers from the other surveys. It definitely appears that transition is a difficult time for many veterans.

Mr. Luc Desilets: All right.

You mentioned rehabilitation services. Who provides those services at the transition centres?

Mr. Steven Harris: For members who haven't yet left the Canadian Armed Forces, rehabilitation services are provided by the armed forces' vocational rehabilitation program. I can let Commodore Bouchard tell you about that. If veterans experience service-related difficulties following release, rehabilitation services are provided by Veterans Affairs Canada through a group that we often work with called Partners in Canadian Veterans Rehabilitation Services.

Mr. Luc Desilets: That's the private group that the department hired a year ago, isn't it?

Mr. Steven Harris: Correct.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Excellent.

Ms. Hicks, you said something that surprised me, and that's a good thing. You said that, once they've left the forces and have become veterans, members can access telemedicine services for one year post-release. Is that what you said?

[English]

Ms. Jane Hicks: It's a pilot that we have right now that is for members who are medically releasing for one year post-release. They can have access to the telemedicine for the veteran, the family and their children. It includes prescriptions, referrals and whatnot.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Are you saying that all veterans are entitled to one year of coverage?

[English]

Ms. Jane Hicks: It's for medically releasing veterans. It's a pilot at this point in time. It was intended for medically releasing members, because it was perceived that those were the ones who needed it the most at this point in time. We'll evaluate the results.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: I see. So my understanding is that it's for veterans who have been medically released from the forces. Can those veterans also use the telemedicine program to complete their applications?

[English]

Ms. Jane Hicks: No, the telemedicine is not designed to fill out forms for disability benefits and things like that. It's really for primary, acute health care.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Harris, as you know, homelessness is a major concern for the committee and society in general. We know that there's unfortunately a high rate of homelessness among people who leave the armed forces, for many reasons. One of those reasons, which we've discovered in recent years and have explored a little more, is the difficulty involved in obtaining the compensation to which those veterans are entitled. Here I'm going back to the applications processing backlog. It's a long process for these veterans, and, after a while, they give up.

Can you tell us where the backlog currently stands? I'm particularly interested in the differences between men and women and between English and French applications.

• (1135)

Mr. Steven Harris: I can definitely provide the committee with the exact details. As for files that are backlogged more than 16 weeks, there are approximately 5,000. That's a significant reduction from the 23,000 files we had three years ago.

Mr. Luc Desilets: How old are those figures?

Mr. Steven Harris: They're from the last quarter, which ended in December.

Mr. Luc Desilets: What about the difference in processing times between English and French files?

Mr. Steven Harris: They're absolutely the same, and the same is true of men's and women's files. There may be minor differences of a week or two in processing times between the two groups, depending on the quarter, but, generally speaking, they're exactly the same.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desilets.

I now turn the floor over to Ms. McPherson.

[English]

You have six minutes, please.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. I'm a new person to this committee, so please forgive me if my questions are not as clear as they need to be.

I am a granddaughter of a veteran. Of course, I have many family members who have been in the service. We're all very proud of them. I also have many constituents who are veterans of our armed forces. In fact, I'm thinking today about one of my constituents, Charles Scott, who really struggled when he left the military. He

continued to struggle for a very long time within Veterans Affairs with PTSD and other health issues. He did not feel there was a good transition for him.

I'm happy that we're doing this study. Of course, I always wonder when we do study after study whether any action follows through with those recommendations, but it is good to see this.

Commander Bouchard, I have some questions for you. One of the challenges that Mr. Scott told me about was the idea that ongoing staff changes, understaffing and under-resourcing meant that he was constantly feeling like he was bounced around to different program officers and different experts. In fact, some of his documentation was lost. It was a very bad situation for somebody who was already struggling with mental health challenges.

I know that you said a transition adviser is assigned to somebody who is transitioning. What steps are put in place to make sure that this is adequate and that there is not a bouncing around of people and veterans from person to person, which makes them feel a little bit like they're not being cherished or not being valued?

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: Thank you very much for the question.

The results from the lack of personnel were recognized. That's why a significant investment was made in the Canadian Armed Forces transition group as it was stood up. For members who have been identified as having complex transition requirements or longer transition periods, we've established an interdisciplinary team that has developed an integrated transition plan. We have representation from a service manager. The CAF nurse case manager will also participate. A personnel selection officer is made available in that dynamic. As was referred to earlier, the long-term disability vocational rehab counsellor participates, as do members from Veterans Affairs Canada, chain of command and even the family liaison officer.

This forms the genesis of the committee to make sure that the needs of the individuals and their families are met. That also is the location where they make a recommendation on a date of release to make sure that the individual is ready for release.

Out of our 27 transition centres, 24 are in full operational capability. The three remaining will be done by April 1. The training will be in place. The individuals have been identified. They're ready to operate to make sure there are no gaps like the one you were mentioning.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you. I think that's important.

You talked about the idea of complex transitions and what that might look like. One of the issues that I know my colleague Rachel Blaney has worked on in this committee has to do with military sexual trauma, or MST. How are you addressing that?

Perhaps you could talk a little bit as well about the differences that women face with regard to transition. Women often have child care needs that are different from those of men. They have different transition needs. Then, of course, when we have gender-based violence occurring in the military, how are you managing that transition and making sure you're meeting the needs of those veterans?

• (1140)

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: Thank you very much for the question.

To meet the needs of an individual dealing with an operational stress injury, we also have, post-release or while serving, OSISS, which is peers with lived experience. If you're suffering from military sexual trauma, there are limitations on what that group can facilitate. We're working very closely with the SMSRC, the sexual misconduct support and resource centre, and also with our partners at Veterans Affairs. There's a peer support program being developed that will specifically look at these needs for those affected by military sexual trauma.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you. That's good. Certainly, I would hope that you would listen to those veterans who have lived experience with MST.

I would also love your perspective on how we are supporting women who have other needs, perhaps, aside from MST. What are those other ways in which the transition centres are addressing needs that would be unique to women veterans?

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: Thank you very much for the question.

First and foremost is placing the individual at the centre of that transition process, so it's working with them to develop a personalized plan depending on their needs and their challenges. Working with Veterans Affairs Canada at the strategic level, we have a joint steering committee that is looking at different priorities. One of them is women's diversity and health, which will be focusing on what we can do even more for women who are transitioning while in service and also after they transition.

We also have a total health and wellness strategy that has specific programs tailored for women's health. There are a number of initiatives that are being closely worked on with the Canadian Forces health services. The surgeon general has the majority of those programs around welfare services.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'm out of time, but I'm wondering if you could submit some of those programs in writing to the analysts so they can include that in their research.

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McPherson.

We're going to start the second round of questions for 25 minutes. We are happy to have the witnesses until 12:30, so members are going to have a third round of questions.

Let's start this round with Mr. Richards for five minutes, please.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thanks.

Maybe, Commodore Bouchard, I'll start with you.

Could you provide the number of CAF members who have been released from the armed forces since the inception of the transition centres? You can provide it by year or as an overall number.

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: Thank you very much for the question.

We use a 10-year average at this time with Veterans Affairs Canada, because the COVID era impacted our numbers quite a bit from that perspective. On average, 8,200 members over the past 10 years have been releasing on a yearly basis.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. Can you tell us how many veterans have utilized the transition centres, and what percentage that would be of those releasing members since the centres were created?

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: Thank you very much for the question.

As we are still in the process of launching the military-to-civilian transition, not all of my transition centres are at full operational capability. I do not have that number with me, but I can commit to return that answer.

Mr. Blake Richards: You do have that number; you just don't have it with you.

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: Yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. If you could provide that in writing to the committee, please, that would be appreciated and very helpful. I think this is a great initiative, frankly, but we have to have those kinds of metrics to be able to know how successful it is. Can you maybe give us some sense of the metrics you would be utilizing to determine the success?

I know there's only been a limited period of time, and they're not fully set up. However, obviously it would be good to get some sense as to what their success has been in terms of something that would give us concrete numbers or metrics.

• (1145)

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: Thank you very much for the question.

At this time, we have some surveys we're administering. One is the unit release interview that the chain of command and we look after. That provides us with the reasons for release, the attrition data. Then we also have an exit survey that we are administering at this time. We will be utilizing that information to make an analysis on the quality of our services and if there are domains of well-being that were not being met. There's also a post-transition—

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm sorry to interrupt you for a second there. At this point in time we don't actually have anything that determines whether there's been an improvement in terms of the outcomes for releasing members based on these centres. It sounds like you're in the process of creating it—

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: We are in the process of collecting the data.

Mr. Blake Richards: —but at this point we don't actually have an answer to that question.

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: That's correct.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. Do you have a sense as to when you will have that data available?

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: It's one year post the full operational capabilities, so by April 2025.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. I know our study will be long completed by then, but it would sure be wonderful if you could provide that to the committee when it is available. I think that's obviously very helpful. I certainly hope the numbers will be good. That's I think what we all hope.

Before I move on, can I just ask you this? Later in the meeting today, we're dealing with a motion regarding the monument to the mission in Afghanistan. Obviously, there are many members of that mission still serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, and there would be others who would have transitioned out. I'm just curious if you can tell us what consultation, if any, occurred between Veterans Affairs and the transition group regarding the national monument to the mission in Afghanistan.

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: We worked with our counterparts at Veterans Affairs Canada in order to provide the information to inform the families of the fallen when Veterans Affairs Canada wanted to contact the families to inform them of the monument.

Mr. Blake Richards: Was there any consultation in terms of getting a sense as to what transitioning members or active, still-serving members from that mission thought or what their opinions were?

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: There was no consultation with the transition group.

Mr. Blake Richards: I will move to Mr. Harris or whoever is best positioned to answer. You can direct, Steven. If it's somebody else—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Blake Richards: I want to ask you about the backlog in claims. I know that there's been lots of cheering that the backlog is said to be largely cleared out, but it seems as though what's really happening is that many of these backlog claims are being sloughed off over to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. Their numbers have gone up, and they're saying that, in some cases like hearing loss, tinnitus and things like that, they're approving well over 90% of the cases.

Is this just a case of pushing that over to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board and then slowing down the process for other veterans who are trying to do appeals?

The Chair: Quickly. Maybe you can—

Mr. Steven Harris: The 10-second answer would be no. There are lots of good decisions. We've been making a lot more decisions. As part of making more decisions, sometimes there are more appeals that go forward to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, but we've reduced the backlog, those files beyond 16 weeks, by more than 70%—and that's not by saying “no”. In most cases, it's by saying “yes”.

Mr. Blake Richards: What's the percentage...?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Richards. We are already over. You will be able to come back maybe in the third round.

Now I'd like to invite MP Bryan May for five minutes, please.

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

Before I get to my questions, I want to circle back to earlier today. MP Dowdall brought up some issues regarding homeless veterans. It's a critical question, and it's a good question to talk to today.

I'm wondering, Mr. Harris, if you're familiar with the work being done by Constable Aaron Dale from Toronto, as well as Constable Brian Serapiglia and Constable Dave Cassidy, both from my region, Waterloo region. I'm wondering if you're familiar with the work they're doing on the ground and if you can speak to that a little bit.

• (1150)

Mr. Steven Harris: I'm not sure I'd be able to provide a lot of detail around it.

Mr. Bryan May: I can.

Mr. Steven Harris: I know that our local area director works very closely with them on all of their initiatives.

I'll ask Mark in a second to chime in. He knows a little bit more about it than I do. I would say that's a great example of a community initiative that exists across the country that Veterans Affairs works with quite closely. In some cases, it's that kind of organization. In other cases, it could be the Legion, Vets Canada or Homes for Heroes. There are a lot of great organizations across the country that have a focus on helping veterans who are at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness.

We work directly with them. We have somebody in every one of our offices who's a lead for homelessness for the area and works with community organizations and local organizations on the ground to make sure that, if we can help someone by providing assistance or benefit services, or if we can refer someone to someone else who can help as well, that's great. It's a lot of interplay.

I might ask Mark to speak to the organization you were raising here.

Mr. Mark Roy: The after-hours wellness program that's done by the Toronto Police Association has been a very successful project that we've been working with. It's part of my Scarborough office as well, so we do receive a lot of referrals directly from them, after hours, of veterans who have been seen homeless or are potentially going to be homeless.

For us it's a welcome approach because, once we receive that referral, I get a case manager right away to contact the veteran and then try to work with them directly to see what we can do to help them get off the streets. Either it's through our VEF program, our veterans emergency fund, or sometimes we'll work directly with the Legion, Good Shepherd or other community providers that will help us help this person get off the streets.

Mr. Bryan May: Thank you.

For the benefit of my colleagues, this started in Toronto through the Toronto Police Service, if I'm not mistaken, but—I'm going to brag a little bit about the Waterloo regional police—it's really been taken to the next level by the folks at the Waterloo Regional Police Service. In the first six months of implementing it in my riding, they were able to identify and house 86 veterans.

The challenge, to Mr. Dowdall's point, is identification. I think that veterans who are homeless do not identify as veterans. They do not want to identify as veterans. There's an element of shame there. They distance themselves from their service and, therefore, from their benefits.

This program is taking those who are in direct contact with veterans on the street, that being the Waterloo regional police, and training them on how to identify veterans who don't identify as veterans. They don't use the term "veterans"; they use the term "service". It's fascinating how effective it is. They'll listen for flags. They'll say, "Hey, that reminds me" or "It sounds as if you may have served." All of a sudden, that pride of service comes back, and they identify as veterans.

It's incredibly simple. It's a one-page form that they utilize. I think that if we can figure out a way to nationalize this, it's going to go a long way. I know they're working on that right now.

I've used up almost all of my time. I'm sorry, but I think this is important. It does identify the root issue, which is that they do not identify. We can provide all the services we want, but if we can't identify the veteran, it becomes very difficult to get them into a housed situation.

I have about 30 seconds left. I don't know if you have any other thoughts on that.

Mr. Mark Roy: To add to the success, recently we've been getting referrals from the OPP as well, which is a big thing. The program is slowly expanding. Now my Kingston and Trenton offices have been receiving referrals as well.

Yes, it is a great success.

Ms. Jane Hicks: If I can add one quick point, in terms of the service element, we are actually moving toward asking if they have military service, as opposed to a veteran.... In fact, in the census we had, there was a veteran question and it was exactly that. It was, "Have you served?" as opposed to, "Are you a veteran?"

• (1155)

Mr. Bryan May: Awesome.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Desilets, you now have the floor for two and a half minutes.

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

Mr. Harris, did your department intervene to alter the jury's decision regarding the monument?

Mr. Steven Harris: I'm unfortunately not responsible for that file.

The Chair: Mr. Desilets, I am stopping the clock for a moment to remind you to ask questions relating to the subject of our study, as Mr. Richards did.

Mr. Luc Desilets: All right, Mr. Chair. I admit I was trying my luck.

Mr. Harris, you said it was hard to get figures on homelessness. Don't you think Statistics Canada's last report provides a clear enough picture of homelessness?

Mr. Steven Harris: Many reports have been written about veteran homelessness. It's always a challenge to come up with specific numbers, and I'm sure we could get better numbers if veterans were identified during the census. It's a hard population to survey and, as one member of the committee just said, there are identification problems.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Do you think there has been an increase in veteran homelessness?

Mr. Steven Harris: I think there has unfortunately been an increase in homelessness in general, given the shortage of houses and accommodation. It's hard to say with any accuracy, but it's something we see in the population at large.

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

Mr. Bouchard, how many of the 27 centres in Canada are located in Quebec?

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: Our centres are located in Valcartier, Bagotville and Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. We also have a satellite office in Montreal.

Mr. Luc Desilets: That's fantastic.

Is the service offered in both official languages outside Quebec?

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: Yes, the service is always offered to transitioning members in both official languages.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Are all your employees outside Quebec bilingual?

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: There is bilingual capacity at all transition centres.

Mr. Luc Desilets: What do you mean by "capacity"?

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: Not everyone is perfectly bilingual, but someone who can provide the services in his or her second language is always there.

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

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desilets.

[English]

We'll now go to Ms. McPherson for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Again, thank you for the information you're providing. It's been very helpful.

I'm reflecting on what my colleague Mr. May was asking and on some of the research that's been done on how we support veterans. We know a lot of the research is done in the States. Of course, they have a significantly larger pool.

I'm wondering how you are doing research and getting information. What is that commitment to doing research on the needs of transitioning servicemen and servicewomen? How is that happening?

Perhaps, Mr. Harris, I could start with you.

Mr. Steven Harris: Sure. Thanks very much for the question.

I think there are lots of ways that research is happening on veterans. Within Veterans Affairs Canada we have a research division. It does not have extensive amounts of money to be able to go out and conduct large-scale research, so we want to be cautious about that. However, we do work with a number of institutions and research institutions that are focused on studying transition and issues with respect to supporting veterans.

The Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research, CIMVHR, is one of them. Veterans Affairs Canada helps fund two centres of excellence. One is on PTSD, which is known as the Atlas Institute. The other is on chronic pain, through McMaster. That helps to support the things it studies and helps both men, women and others, who are going through transition. It looks at what their process is, what barriers they may have and what supports might be needed as well.

We work with Health Canada on a range of other studies that take part particularly in the health domains around what may affect veterans in a particular way. As I mentioned earlier, the census now includes a veteran identifier, and that will provide us with a wealth of information around the status of veterans in Canadian society and how they're feeling.

Ms. Heather McPherson: How are you ensuring that the perspectives and needs of indigenous veterans, women veterans and veterans from minority groups are being adequately met?

• (1200)

Mr. Steven Harris: That's a wonderful question.

We were just speaking earlier with some of the folks who are here in attendance around some new initiatives that have been set up within the department.

We've had an office of women and 2SLGBTQI+ in place for a number of years now, which does direct outreach with those particular communities. We've recently set up an indigenous veterans outreach team as well. Those groups, in terms of the veterans affairs groups, are meeting with stakeholders and interacting with individual veterans to understand what their experiences are and what we may be able to do, from a Veterans Affairs Canada perspective, to help them individually and collectively in terms of their needs and how their needs may be different from those of other veterans.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Commander Bouchard, do you have any comment you'd like to make on that as well?

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: Thank you very much for the question.

We also have, inside the Canadian Armed Forces directorate, something that's called the director general military personnel research and analysis, which assists us quite a bit with all the research. They work very closely with the surgeon general's team and were invited to work closely with Veterans Affairs Canada and us to facilitate our research.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

Ms. Hicks.

Ms. Jane Hicks: If you don't mind, I was going to say that we are very connected to the Five Eyes countries. There's a research body that works with the Five Eyes countries, and they share research and whatnot. They are connected in the international community with respect to veterans and transition.

Ms. Heather McPherson: That's great.

I have one other question, and maybe I'll do this with you, Commander Bouchard.

In terms of how you're communicating this with veterans, I—

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. McPherson.

It's two minutes and a half.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Oh, it goes fast.

The Chair: I'm so sorry, but you will have a chance to come back in the third round.

I'm now pleased to invite Mr. Fraser Tolmie to take the floor for five minutes, please.

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for coming today, for the service of those who have served and for your time.

Chair, through you, I'm going to ask this question because it's one that's swirling around in my mind after hearing a bit of the testimony. It's piggybacking on my colleague, Mr. Dowdall's, comments from earlier. The question I have right now is this: What is it going to take to create a healthy organization—meaning Veterans Affairs—to help veterans who are in need?

I'm asking myself this question because I want to know what it's going to take to shorten the span of time from recommendations that come from here to implementation. I ask that question because earlier on Mr. Dowdall brought forward a report from 2018: "A Seamless Transition to Civilian Life For All Veterans: It's Time For Action". Six years ago, it was time for action for vets who were homeless.

Mr. Harris, earlier on, you shared with us that there is going to be an announcement—a launch—in the spring. This is six years later. We're going to be having a launch for something that was identified six years ago. Part of this launch, if I understand, is that money is now going to be allocated from Veterans Affairs to the Infrastructure Bank, which is another layer of bureaucracy and a holdup for people who are homeless and in need.

I want to know what it's going to take for us, when we complete our reports here, to be able to shorten the span to help people who are in need.

Mr. Steven Harris: Thanks very much.

I'd offer a couple of things, since the question spans a couple of issues.

First and foremost, I want to be clear that the money is not coming from Veterans Affairs to go to Infrastructure Canada. The money was awarded in the budget to Infrastructure Canada—which is leading on the national housing strategy—for it to use its expertise on homelessness. It's supported by Veterans Affairs, which is providing them with information and supporting them in terms of delivery on that.

The money in the budget was awarded directly to Infrastructure Canada, and we are assisting in the delivery of that. That's coming. The announcement was already made. It's actually in the set-up of operations. Infrastructure Canada will be able to provide proper timelines around that as that goes forward.

In the meantime, with respect to housing and homelessness for veterans, there have been a number of improvements and advances. I talked earlier about the veterans emergency fund, which was launched in 2018. This is a fund that provides immediate assistance with a very short time frame—we talked about time frames—to veterans who may need it immediately to right their housing situation. It is only short term. However, I know we've helped more than 300 veterans from a housing and homelessness point of view using just the veterans emergency fund alone. That's just one new thing.

The second part is certainly, as you said, the issue of how quickly we can make decisions and get assistance to veterans. In terms of supports and services from decision-making, reducing the backlog is actually a significant assistance for veterans in terms of getting decisions and getting access to programs, services and money that will help them on that front. That's a second piece.

The income replacement benefit for those veterans going through a rehabilitation program is another way. Ninety per cent of their pre-release income is another way of helping people and preventing them from experiencing any kind of homelessness.

With respect to the recommendations of the committee, be they previous studies or not, we do take very seriously the implementation of those recommendations. They don't always come with specific targets, either the recommendations or the support that's issued, in terms of a response to the committee. However, I can tell you that we take those recommendations very seriously, and we do try to implement them to make improvements and offer improved services to veterans and their families.

• (1205)

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

For me, it's my confidence that this committee's being heard and we're seeing the implementation of recommendations that we've worked hard for to help people who are in need. That is where I'm coming from. We need a healthy organization to help people who are in need and who are facing challenges, and the many who are

either physically impaired or need housing. That is where my line of questioning has been coming from.

Thank you.

The Chair: Give a quick answer, please, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Steven Harris: I would completely agree. What we want to do is to make sure that the Veterans Affairs organization is in a position of opportunity and strength to help veterans. There have been a number of programs and services added. There's been increased staffing for us to be able to ensure that we can deliver services to veterans in need. We have more veterans coming to us than in previous times, and we've wanted to make sure we're in a position to respond to them from a case management perspective, when they're submitting a disability application or by having a range of programs to support them in their transition as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I'd like to invite MP Lisa Hepfner for five minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all of our guests for being here to answer these questions today.

Also, to the veterans in the room, we appreciate that you're here to listen to these deliberations today.

I am also new to this committee, so I maybe don't have the background knowledge that some of the other committee members have. Previously, I was a journalist. What I've been thinking about today is one particular series I did on a veteran from Hamilton Mountain who talked about the PTSD he was suffering from.

I think, for him, it took a long time to even realize he was suffering from anything. He was having difficulty connecting with his wife, difficulty starting a family, difficulty getting a job, difficulty even driving. He talked about the hypervigilance that followed him around since he had served in a combat scenario and how he was unable to even drive without being overcome with intense anger. He had colleagues of his who had committed suicide since they had left the service. I don't think he was getting the support from Veterans Affairs that he had expected.

That was at least five years ago, probably longer. What would he expect today from Veterans Affairs that's different?

Mr. Steven Harris: I may just start, and then I'll ask my colleagues to chime in as well.

First and foremost, we're talking about transition, the actual process of going from the Canadian Armed Forces to perhaps Veterans Affairs, but really, to a post-military life, releasing from the military.

While we have a lot of people who release on an annual basis who come directly to Veterans Affairs, because they have identified medical needs or they know the challenges they may face from the interventions we have, we also have a lot of veterans who come to us six months later, 12 months later or 10 years later with issues that weren't identified at the time they released, either because they didn't accept it themselves, they didn't recognize it in themselves or they weren't ready to share those kinds of things.

Transition is really a long journey. It may be something that we can immediately provide some assistance to help with. It may be something that a veteran comes back to us with years later, and that's okay too. The transition piece can take a long period of time. They can come to Veterans Affairs whenever they need to.

I'll ask both Mark and Jane, and the commodore too if he wants to weigh in, about changes that have been made and what that person may feel is different or see differently.

• (1210)

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: As we go through the domains of well-being in the plan, identifying these issues early is critical and then providing the support. There's also the OSISS program, which is joint with Veterans Affairs Canada. This is the operational stress injury support system, which is a peer support program with those who have lived experience, which can very much facilitate the dealing and coping. It's available for serving members and veterans, but also their families.

We have other programs such as Soldier On, a program that provides activities through leisure, recreation, the creative and also through sports. It allows them to go on their journey of recovery with others who are in a similar situation.

Thank you.

Ms. Jane Hicks: If I may, [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] is that with the whole new transition process is education and awareness. There are new tools in terms of transition that the commodore mentioned being on Canada.ca., that information, so that veterans, if they run into difficulties, know where to go and how to reach us in those times of need. They can reach out.

That's part of the intent of the transition process: to educate, and for them to know, if they don't need the assistance now but they do later, where to go to reach us.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: I don't know who would be best to answer this, but what would you say are the biggest barriers to a successful transition out of military life?

Mr. Mark Roy: It's really dependent on the person themselves. We all live life in a different way. Members transition in very different ways. It could depend on location. It could depend on what social assistance they have around them. Do they have family around them? Do they not? There could be multiple factors. It could be a health-related issue. It could be because they transitioned to an area that's more remote. They might be facing employment issues or access to health care. It's really dependent on the person's journey.

As Mr. Harris described earlier, transition doesn't end at the point where you release from the military. Issues may crop up years down the road. It may be that you had a perfect plan and were healthy going out of transition, and then suddenly something impacted you or something triggered you, and your PTSD appeared and you have a health issue.

People can come back to Veterans Affairs at any point. It might be that you talk to a veterans service agent at the start, but through an assessment we then find out that you have more barriers that are

impacting you. At that point, we will work with you on setting goals that will make for a successful transition.

That's what we do to assist.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have 15 minutes to go.

I'd like to invite Mrs. Cathay Wagantall to proceed for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much for being here. I really appreciate it.

I have a question about the average with regard to the attrition over the last 10 years in light of COVID. Of course, I assume that the skewing due to COVID was due to the fact that we had a change in expectations for vaccinations for our armed forces.

I'm wondering if you're aware of how many serving members were released due to being declared unsuitable for service with their misconduct in choosing not to get the COVID vaccine. What were those numbers that made the spike?

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: At this time, I do not have that information readily available with me here. I apologize.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: But there would be a number. Are you able to get that number for us?

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: I will see if the number is available.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: I would appreciate that very much.

Mr. Steven Harris: If I might, I would only say that part of the reason the number changed and the commodore referred to a 10-year average is that some people didn't release during COVID. They weren't ready to release. Some of the services that would normally be in place to help them during that release weren't available because of restrictions and other things. As a result, some people stayed in the Canadian Armed Forces a little bit longer.

That might be part of the reason for the change in average.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Sure, so you'd be able to tell how many were due to that rationale or reasoning and how many were due to being dismissed because of the change in the COVID vaccination policies over the course of 2021—

• (1215)

Mr. Steven Harris: I think the commodore has indicated that he will try to get that information. The rest is part of a flow.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: All right. I appreciate it. Thank you very much.

Ms. Hicks, you talked about the whole transition process. Part of it is a post-release follow-up. I'm curious about whether you could tell me a bit more. We often hear from veterans that it's literally a decade before they come to grips with the fact that they need assistance. That's long past that initial transition period, which of course is really important. I'm not making light of that, for sure.

How long after you help them with that transition do you actually do that follow-up? How are you keeping in touch? It seems there's so much difficulty in keeping track of these wonderful folks. How exactly do you do that?

Ms. Jane Hicks: A couple of things happen. First of all, we're notified of their release. Once they go through a transition interview, then there's a screening tool to identify their risk of release. If everything seems fine, then they are lower risk. Those who are medium and higher will be scheduled for a 30-day post-release follow-up. We would follow up with the veteran to see how they're doing, how they're tracking and go from there. We also make sure they know that, if they need assistance, they can come back to us.

That's typically how we approach it. They can come back at any point in time through contact with the local area office and My VAC Account. A lot of members and veterans have access to My VAC Account and secure messaging. We get a lot of messaging that way or through our contact centre.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: These are the transition centres. I'm wondering at what point you say, "Okay, we're done with this whole process. Now you're accountable or you're in communication with VAC."

Ms. Jane Hicks: It depends on the need. If an individual has moderate needs, they might be assigned a veterans service agent who might work with them for targeted assistance, certain benefits and services.

If there are higher needs and more complex needs, they would be assigned a case manager, and the case manager would work with them until such time as they don't need that service any longer. It depends on the individual circumstances. There's not a one-size-fits-all.

Mr. Mark Roy: To add to that and to answer your question, we also do a lot of outreach in the community. We visit our local Legion, and we talk to other partners within our areas to show that we're out there so that members know that they can come to us. I know that recently we went to the Sault Ste. Marie area with a team. We invited the community to come so that veterans could come and get their questions answered personally.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: These would be individuals who had left for how long? We talk about that decade of silence before the—

Mr. Mark Roy: It could be at any time.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you. I appreciate that.

I have a question here. I don't know if any of you can answer it for me, but I'm going to put it forward.

In regard to the external review that took place for those who chose not to take the COVID vaccine, the chief of the defence staff has that information available to him; however, he doesn't have to follow up on the recommendations.

I have a note from spokesperson Jessica Lamirande that says, "The CAF forms its decisions on vaccination by considering the most up-to-date medical evidence and advice, the current federal posture and the need to be operationally ready in terms of both force health and ability to act in an environment where any vaccine-preventable illness is a hazard to individuals and the mission."

Can you define for me what that means, the "current federal posture"? What is that? Does anyone know?

Mr. Steven Harris: I wouldn't be able to offer an answer on that, no.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now, for five minutes, I invite MP Sean Casey to speak, please.

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

In preparing for the meeting, we get a briefing note from the Library of Parliament. As I go through that note, I see a bit of an alphabet soup of programs, services and organizations involved in the transition process. After I list them, my question is going to be this: How can you reasonably expect someone who's going through an important chapter in their life to figure all this out?

Here is the list: the service income security insurance plan; operational trauma and stress support centres; operational stress injury clinics; integrated transition plans; the second career assessment network program; integrated personnel support centres, which are now transition centres; the Veterans Affairs Canada rehabilitation program; the income replacement benefit; military family resource centres; the couples overcoming PTSD everyday program; and the education and training benefit.

I understand that all of these things, all these programs and benefits, serve a function, but it strikes me that it would be overwhelming for someone at that stage in their life to try to get their head around all of it.

How do you do that? Can you tell me what efforts are made and what your level of success is in educating people through all of those things? I realize that all of them have merit. It's just that it's a bit overwhelming.

• (1220)

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: Thank you very much for the question. It is indeed a complex ecosystem.

First and foremost is the earlier, the better. We're doing an outreach program with the chains of command and the units to advise them to come participate at the second career assistance network—the SCAN—seminar. Most in the military will understand that, in our world of acronyms. They will attend those SCAN seminars and the intent is to have the information available for our members. They should be participating as early as possible throughout their careers.

Generally speaking, it's at least six months out—I would prefer one year—to follow the different training that's available, to come to grasp the actual process of transition and then to understand their sense of purpose and develop that plan as they proceed. The last 30 days are dedicated for the transition itself, but it really is six months prior that they should be looking after all of the various....

It's important to recognize that not everybody will require as much assistance and a lot of these programs will be couched in.... For example, if they're a medical release, then there is a list of the programs that are available to them.

The transition centres are there to support the member and the family through that process and to make sure they understand all the programs that are available. The centre, as was said before, is co-located with Veterans Affairs, and the Legion will participate also. We have many resources that can facilitate that process for our members.

Mr. Sean Casey: Do you have anything to add on the VAC side?

Go ahead, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Steven Harris: I think the commander did a great job of capturing it, but to the member's point, they're all linked. These are all important elements that serve in each of these programs. They're all safety nets.

The key point and takeaway here is that the members are not asked to do this on their own. They're asked to do this in concert with representatives of the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs in transition centres and outside of transition centres for veterans who may need to come to us from that point of view.

We have people who are essentially navigators—veterans service agents, case managers and others—who work in either the transition centres or Veterans Affairs offices and who help connect people with these various programs. Some are offered by Veterans Affairs, some by the Canadian Armed Forces and others in the community are helpful, depending on the individual need.

The point is that we don't want to leave people to have to figure it out on their own—to figure out what the alphabet soup means and what it looks like. We have trained professionals to do the assessment of what the needs might be and what programs and services are in place to help support individuals.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Desilets, go ahead for two and a half minutes.

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

I would like to start with a brief comment before asking my first question. That comment is similar to what Ms. McPherson said earlier. For lack of time, she was interrupted when she was discussing the issue of women.

We are completing a study on veterans following 23 meetings. This is the biggest study ever conducted on the subject. Many women, if not the majority of those who spoke, said they didn't feel recognized or appropriately honoured. It seems to me this kind of recognition is a truly important form of support. It also forms the basis of the relationship of trust that must exist between women and the Department of Veterans Affairs so that all those big, beautiful programs, which my colleague Mr. Casey mentioned earlier, can be put in place, function and yield the desired results.

However, we see from our report that there's unfortunately not much positive content in the comments that women made regarding their experience with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the

transition they were undertaking to civilian life. That was the comment I wanted to make.

Mr. Harris, following on from what I just said, a report was released six years ago. Here we are now, six years later. It's always unfortunate that it takes this long in our system. What about this program? What's in it?

• (1225)

Mr. Steven Harris: I'd like to clarify one point, Mr. Desilets: are you referring to the transition of female veterans to civilian life?

Mr. Luc Desilets: Yes.

Mr. Steven Harris: In fact, it's not exactly a program but rather a process that's based on programs and people in the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Canadian Armed Forces, which support male and female veterans during their transition.

Mr. Luc Desilets: I see.

Mr. Steven Harris: The work is done in a partnership to ensure that everything's in place to support the veterans and their families.

We're still discussing this today because this is a process that can be improved, still and always. It can't come to an end. We can't say we've done everything to help veterans during their transition. There are always things that can be improved or changed based on new challenges that emerge from the stories and experiences the veterans relate to us.

The committee may conduct another transition study six years from now. By then, I hope it will be able to see the progress we've made with the process. This initiative is constantly evolving; there will always be work to do on it.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Comparing the situation from six years ago to that of today, what changes and improvements have you made?

Mr. Steven Harris: The Department of Veterans Affairs now works more closely with veterans and does preventive work with them, which helps to facilitate initial actions and to ensure the programs are implemented.

We want to make sure that people don't tell us six years later that they didn't have a good experience. We want them to contact us immediately during their transition to civilian life. Having said that, I acknowledge that there will always be a large number of people who will come back to see us after their transition. However, I want to be sure that most of the problems are solved during the transition.

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

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris and Mr. Desilets.

[*English*]

To conclude, I invite Ms. McPherson to go ahead for two and half minutes, please.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

Having listened to the testimony today, it sounds to me like there are these programs and a wide range of different resources that are in place. I think we've tried to tease out how effective those programs are. There's the communication piece to make sure that veterans know that these programs are there, but what seems to me to be the cog for all of this is how many transition advisers we have and how well they are staffed across the country.

I'd like some more information about how many transition officers there are. What is that ratio? How many are there per veteran? Does that change whether it's in an urban or a rural setting? How is that managed? From my perspective, it does seem like the best-laid plans. You can have the very best programs in the world, but if there's no way to implement those programs, they don't work and they don't help our veterans.

Perhaps I could start with you, Commander.

• (1230)

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: Yes, indeed.

To come back to your earlier question on communications about the research, ma'am, just very rapidly, we also have guides and electronic information through the digital transition centre, and that's how we provide a lot of our information.

With respect to the actual number of transition advisers, it really depends on the region. I was just in Bagotville, where they have a limited number of transitions. Therefore, there are fewer advisers in that region as opposed to here in Ottawa, for example, where the majority of our memberships will be older and there will be a larger number of people in transition—

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'm sorry to interrupt you, Commander, but in general, across the entire program, what is the ratio?

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: I have to get back to you on the actual specifics for that number.

Ms. Heather McPherson: It would be great if you could let our analysts know that.

I'm sorry—and I interrupted you—but it's just in terms of making sure that there are adequate transition advisers. We know that there were deep cuts to Veterans Affairs under the previous administration and that it has not been built up under this administration to the way that it needs to be.

How do you feel that you are doing in terms of having the adequate ratio in place?

Cmdre Daniel Bouchard: We've been working very hard to establish the process and to have the transition centres fully operating, and then we'll be taking approximately a year to evaluate how those services are offered. We started to do some small changes internally, but at this time the needs of our members are met by the current staffing, with the plan that was in place.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This brings the first part of our meeting to an end. Before we move on to the second part, on the motion by Mr. Richards, I would like to welcome our guests.

[*English*]

Colleagues, we thank for being with us, from the Department of National Defence, Mr. Daniel Bouchard, commander of the Canadian Armed Forces transition group; and from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Steven Harris, assistant deputy minister, service delivery branch; Ms. Jane Hicks, acting director general, service delivery and program management; and Mr. Mark Roy, area director, central Ontario.

We'll now take a short break.

[*Translation*]

We will now suspend.

• (1230)

(Pause)

• (1235)

The Chair: We will resume.

In this second part, we will resume debate on the motion by Blake Richards. At the last meeting, an amendment was moved by MP Shaun Casey, to whom I yield the floor.

[*English*]

Please, go ahead.

Mr. Sean Casey: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As you indicated, I think where we left off... I'll leave it to you and the clerk as to whether we require a motion to resume debate. That's probably what would be in order, although I'm not sure that's what happened at the last meeting.

An hon. member: It was suspended.

Mr. Sean Casey: No, I think it was adjourned because everyone had to leave at 6:30.

I guess the first thing I would say is that, in order for this to be properly in front of us, there's probably a requirement to have a motion to resume debate. Nonetheless, you called on me to speak to the amendment that I introduced once we started talking about the motion at our last meeting.

The amendment I introduced was actually to add another category of documents.

It's ironic that over the weekend there was a news story on this very topic, which was the lack of unanimity and dissent within the jury that made the decision and how very pleased one of the jury members was to hear that the government had reversed the decision made by the jury. Clearly, there will be documents around this. They've already been publicly reported as a result of being obtained by the media under an access to information request. If we're going on this fishing expedition for documents, this is a pond in which some fish will be found.

Again, I'm not sure the motion is properly before us, but you asked me to speak to this, so here we are.

The amendment I propose is that the motion be amended by adding, after paragraph b)(vii), the following: “And that Veterans Affairs Canada produce any correspondence received from members of the jury responsible for evaluating the finalist designs for the National Monument to Canada's Mission in Afghanistan since June of 2023.”

The rationale for it is as I set forward. I leave it to you to deal with whether the motion is properly before us. If and when it is, that's an amendment I would like to propose.

Thank you.

• (1240)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

[*Translation*]

I would like to welcome Mr. Paul-Hus, who is joining us.

Mr. Desilets, you would like to take the floor to speak to this amendment.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Casey, we've heard your remarks in recent days, but there are also some documents circulating—

[*English*]

Mr. Bryan May: I have point of order.

There was a speaking list already established when this was adjourned.

I think Mr. Casey's question about whether we're in an appropriate situation right now without moving this motion needs to be answered, first of all.

Second of all, has the speaking list disappeared? It sounds like we're starting a new speaking list.

The Chair: Exactly, Mr. May. There was a speaking list, but it was on the motion.

At the last meeting, Mr. Casey had the floor, so he introduced that amendment, and we put it on the notice.

Mr. Bryan May: Did we get through the entire speaking list for Mr. Casey's amendment?

The Chair: No, there was none.

Mr. Bryan May: I understand we're debating the amendment, but we had started that and there was a speaking list.

We adjourned and I'm simply asking if the speaking list gets wiped out.

The Chair: It was on the motion itself. Now we have an amendment—

Mr. Bryan May: We had nobody on the speaking list for his amendment.

The Chair: No.

Mr. Bryan May: I stand corrected.

The Chair: I'm welcoming any interventions.

For now, we have Mr. Desilets and after that, Mr. Richards.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Mr. Desilets.

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

I believe we're all aware of what has circulated in the newspapers in recent days regarding the remarks made by a member of the jury. In any event, there should be some written documents on the subject. That's one of the requests that we made under the Access to Information Act. It's not a problem.

It must be noted that the jury's selection was reached by a majority decision, not a unanimous one. I would also note that four of the seven people on the jury were from Veterans Affairs Canada.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would like to go to a vote so that no one delays the process and we can move this matter forward. This motion was introduced two months ago.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desilets.

Go ahead, Mr. Sarai.

[*English*]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

I think this amendment by Mr. Casey is important. We've had recent reports that there was a perception that the jury was unanimous in its opinion. It turns out it was not. In fact, one of the lay veteran representatives on that jury was dismayed by the decision. It would be good to understand why and what their opinions were, especially with them being veterans.

As we saw, most of the survey results preferred the design by indigenous designer Adrian Stimson. I think, in fact, there was a quote. Someone wished to share it: “Whoooooohooooooo! You made my year! Maybe my decade!!!!” Mr. Windsor, who was one of the jury members, said that. I think that was in the records in some of the correspondence going back and forth.

I think it's very important to understand how they deliberated. Were the interests of the veterans or the views of the veterans taken into consideration? What artistic representation best reflected a veteran and a veteran's contribution and sacrifices?

In support of Mr. Casey's amendment, I think it's very important that we include those documents.

• (1245)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Casey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sean Casey: Very briefly, I want to thank Mr. Desilets for his support for this amendment because it is he who said during a debate in the House that the jury's decision was unanimous. Now he says that wasn't the case. This underscores how important it is to have these documents.

The Chair: Since there will be more interventions, we will put Mr. Casey's amendment to a vote.

Do we have unanimous consent to adopt Mr. Casey's amendment?

An hon. member: I request a recorded vote.

The Chair: We will therefore proceed accordingly.

(Amendment negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: We will resume debate on the motion as such.

Go ahead, Mr. May.

[*English*]

Mr. Bryan May: Just again, on a point of order, Mr. Chair, do we now go back to the original speaking list?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Bryan May: Not at all.

The Chair: No, not at all.

Mr. Bryan May: Okay. That's fair enough.

I'd like to consider, Mr. Chair, a second amendment. First of all, I'm disappointed that none of the information that is available to us—especially what came about this weekend—is going to be talked about in this motion. I find that very interesting—

[*Translation*]

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

The Chair: Mr. May, I must interrupt you. There is a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Desilets.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Chair, I know you were looking elsewhere, and I waited until the last vote to raise my hand. I looked to the other side, and I saw that I had the right to vote.

I think they're trying to extend—

The Chair: I believe you mean you had the right to speak.

Mr. Luc Desilets: That's it: the right to speak.

The Chair: That's true, Mr. Desilets. As I told you, I looked down at the same time as the clerk—

Mr. Luc Desilets: That can happen. Both of you were looking down, but I had my head up so I could look the other way.

The Chair: We didn't see that you had raised your hand. Pardon me.

We will take special care in future to notice raised hands in the room.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Chair, can we go back to what I was saying? I don't know if anyone else managed to see it on your side.

They're trying to extend the debate, but I want to advance the debate quickly. I also have an amendment to introduce.

• (1250)

The Chair: I understand, Mr. Desilets. I also understand you because you aren't on Zoom. You are here. Call me next time; let me know.

Mr. May—

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Chair, what can be done about procedure? With all due respect, I unfortunately challenge your decision. I request a vote so we can decide the matter.

The Chair: All right, well—

[*English*]

Mr. Bryan May: Seriously. Wow.

I have a point of order, Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I would ask you to wait a moment while I consult the clerk. So I will suspend.

• (1250)

(Pause)

• (1250)

The Chair: We're back.

Members of the committee, Mr. Desilets' comment on my decision, which he challenges, is ruled a dilatory motion.

I am asking the members if they uphold my decision to yield the floor to Mr. May. If that is not the case, we will have to go to a vote.

Do we—

[*English*]

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: I have a point of order, Chair.

My point of order is that I'm not sure you can challenge the chair on a point of order. Is that what you can do? We're on a point of order here and a point of order there, and suddenly we're voting on something.

It's very confusing to me.

The Chair: I'm sorry.

Mr. Desilets has the floor first, and he asked for something. Mr. May had the floor at that time. After his intervention, Mr. May said he had a point of order. I said to wait, because I had to discuss that with the table. The decision was that we can go back, so we have to vote on that.

If you do not agree that Mr. May takes the floor, we have to vote, because you challenged the chair.

Mr. Bryan May: I recognize that we have to go right to a vote, but I'm a little confused as to what a “yea” vote versus a “nay” vote—

The Chair: We'll put the question on the floor and it will be really clear.

The question is this: Are we going to continue with the intervention from Mr. May, or should we go back and vote?

Mr. Blake Richards: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, to be clear, my understanding is—

The Chair: We can have a point of order, but I can—

Mr. Blake Richards: It's to understand what we're voting on

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: I want to be clear. This is what I understand we're voting on.

You have ruled that Mr. May should have the floor. Mr. Desilets has challenged that decision.

We are now having a vote on whether we uphold the decision of the chair. Is that correct?

The Chair: Exactly.

Mr. Blake Richards: A yes vote means that we uphold your decision to have Mr. May take the floor. A no vote means that we don't uphold the decision and that Mr. Desilets would take the floor.

The Chair: Exactly.

Mr. Blake Richards: That's good.

The Chair: Does everyone agree with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. First of all, is there unanimous consent for the chair to give the floor to Mr. May?

I don't have unanimous consent, so I'm going to ask the clerk to take the vote on that, please.

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

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

As the decision of the chair is overturned, I yield the floor to Mr. Desilets.

Mr. Luc Desilets: As announced, I now move an amendment to the Conservatives' motion. I believe the clerk and members have received it, and I will now read it:

That the motion be amended by adding the following after paragraph b): "c) And that the Department of Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of Canadian Heritage provide the official report of the jury established for the selection of the firm responsible for the design of the National Monument to Canada's Mission in Afghanistan.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desilets.

Go ahead, Ms. Hepfner.

[*English*]

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you, Chair.

I would like to request the amendment in writing, please.

The Chair: We have received the amendment and the clerk will send it to you by email as soon as possible. We don't have any copies in both languages with us, but I think that we did receive something at the committee.

In the meantime, I don't know if Mr. May would like to talk about the amendment.

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

It was a bit fast for me in the translation, so I'd like to see it written out.

It sounded fairly reasonable in terms of what it's asking. I do think that gathering more information on this from different angles makes sense, but I do want to see this written out, or maybe Monsieur Desilets could repeat it a bit slower for us to be able to consider—

Mr. Blake Richards: I have a point of order.

With all of the delay and stall tactics of the Liberal Party, I really wonder how bad whatever's in these documents is, because they are clearly trying to cover it up.

Mr. Bryan May: It's not a point of order.

The Chair: No, it's not a point of order. The MP is talking about how important it is.

Mr. May, we have one more minute for the committee.

Mr. Bryan May: I think it's a little ironic, to be honest, that the opposition's talking about suppressing documentation when they literally voted down an opportunity to bring a different perspective—a very valid perspective, quite frankly—that has come to light in the most recent weekend.

Mr. Blake Richards: I have a point of order, Chair.

• (1300)

The Chair: No, I'm sorry—

Mr. Blake Richards: This is about the interference of the Prime Minister's Office—

The Chair: Excuse me, it's already—

Mr. Blake Richards: —and this is the fifth time they've delayed the vote on this.

The Chair: Mr. May, you have the floor, but it's already one o'clock, so we have to stop the meeting.

I'd like to know if members—

Mr. Blake Richards: Can we have unanimous consent to continue the meeting for another 20 minutes?

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Blake Richards: The cover-up continues. It must be really bad whatever's in there.

The Chair: I'd like to say thank you to everyone, and thank you to our analysts, our clerk and our technicians.

The meeting is adjourned.

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