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Mr. Tom Lukiwski

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC)): We are now meeting in public.

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today for our continuing study of the hiring of veterans for public service positions.

We've had a bit of a struggle over the last couple of days trying to get witnesses and committee business going while bells are ringing and votes are taking place, so I'm hopeful that we won't have any interruptions today.

I don't have any particular speaking order, so with your permission, witnesses, we'll go in the order on the agenda that I have in front of me, which means our first speaker will be Mr. Richards.

My understanding as well from our clerk is that all of you have brief opening statements of five minutes or less. We will go immediately from there into questions from our committee members.

Mr. Richards, the floor is yours.

Mr. Andrew Richards (As an Individual): Thank you.

I'd like to thank the committee for providing me the opportunity to appear today.

As this committee is looking at the process of hiring veterans for public sector positions, I may be able to provide some insights, as I am a veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces who is now employed in the public sector.

I served for 18 years in the military as both a member of the regular force and the army reserve. During my service, I deployed overseas as a peacekeeper to Bosnia-Herzegovina and to Afghanistan during Canada's combat mission there.

I have now been employed in the public sector for six years, where I work as a border services officer with the Canada Border Services Agency.

I voluntarily chose release from the military to pursue a different career. I applied on an external posting to a border services officer recruitment process. It was not an internal posting, and I was not medically released from the Canadian Armed Forces, so there was no expedited request or priority hiring process in my situation.

In anticipation of transitioning to a different career path from the military, I decided to first obtain post-secondary credentials. I live in the Vancouver area, and at that time the British Columbia Institute of Technology, BCIT, had just started a program to assist veterans wishing to attend post-secondary school. BCIT, with support from the Royal Canadian Legion, was helping veterans apply and transfer their military training and experience to relevant post-secondary credentials and fields. This was called the Legion military skills conversion program. The program was presented to the Senate Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs and subcommittee chair Roméo Dallaire in 2012, I believe.

I attended BCIT in the business management post-diploma program and graduated with distinction in 2012 with a diploma in technology in business management.

It was my desire to continue a career path in the government after serving in the military. There's a knowledge benefit to be gained in the public sector by hiring veterans, in retaining the skills, training and experience they have obtained through their military service.

There is also a cost benefit to the public sector by hiring veterans, in that time and money has already been invested in them through their training and things as basic as, for example, valid security clearances they already hold.

The policy announcement in 2012, on the“recognition of prior service in the Canadian Forces for vacation purposes, was a great incentive to encourage veterans to transition into the public sector after their military service.

There are still barriers to entry for veterans seeking to enter the public sector that are worth addressing. There are programs in place to assist veterans with career transition who have been medically released from the Canadian Armed Forces, but there does not seem to be similar assistance available to veterans who are voluntarily looking to change careers. Public sector postings will list experience or post-secondary requirements and will say, “or equivalent military experience” and that eligible Canadian Forces veterans may apply. What is that experience equivalent to with regard to the public sector?

With the policy on prior service for vacation purposes comes the challenge with the collective agreement environment among the various groups represented in the public sector. The question that comes up is whether military service should be counted as service in the public sector, or is it only to be recognized as policy as service for vacation purposes. Some groups count it as service towards seniority, the same as the policy does in their collective agreements.

In the group I am represented by, prior service did count. Then, as of the current collective agreement, it does not count.

Most recently, the question put to a vote among the union membership was whether military service should or should not be counted under the definition of prior service in the public sector. This vote made by members—the majority of whom are not veterans themselves—resulted in a “no” vote with regards to military service counting as prior service towards the public sector. You can imagine the animosity a vote like this creates in a workplace, and it could make it difficult to promote a future career in the public sector to veterans currently looking to transition from the military.

It would be my pleasure to provide any additional feedback or input to assist veterans in their endeavours to transition from the Canadian Armed Forces to the public sector and to assist the government in future policy creation and implementation.

Thank you for your time in hearing me speak today.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Mr. Wolfgang Zimmermann, representing the National Institute of Disability Management and Research.

Mr. Zimmermann, the floor is yours.

Mr. Wolfgang Zimmermann (Executive Director, National Institute of Disability Management and Research): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

Please let me start by offering my appreciation for the opportunity today to offer a few thoughts on the employment potential that the federal civil service presents for veterans. In this context, I would like to focus especially on veterans who have acquired a mental or physical health impairment, either on or off the job, during their employment with the Canadian Armed Forces.

As a brief personal introduction, I'm privileged to wear two employment hats at the moment, one being president of the Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences, Canada's only statutory university ever created by private legislation and unanimous support of all members of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia and dedicated to education and research on all aspects of the workplace health cycle. We currently offer academic and continuing education programs in return to work and disability management.

My second role is as executive director of the National Institute of Disability Management and Research, established some 25 years ago by a significant group of employers, unions and government representatives with a mandate to drive innovation, thought leadership and best practice economic and social outcomes following onset of a mental or physical health impairment, creating win-win situations for disabled individuals, employers and society.

In this context, and to achieve these results consistently, we developed professional and program standards in return to work and disability management, created an ISO-style organization, the International Disability Management Standards Council, and today, the professional disability management competency standards are formally licensed in 64 countries around the world.

To bring the tremendous opportunity that continued employment within the federal civil service represents for disabled veterans, I draw on my own experience from many years ago working for MacMillan Bloedel, then Canada's largest forest products company, when, on my fifth day on the job, a 50-foot alder tree barber-chaired, came down on me and broke my back. The support of both the company and the union, now the United Steelworkers, and the B.C. workers' compensation board allowed me to continue working for the organization, first in forestry administration, a field I initially graduated from, and then, after retraining, as an accountant.

This was after my successful return to work, which also entailed developing physical accessibility to the administrative building of a completely inaccessible logging camp of almost 500 workers on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Much like a diverse corporation such as MacMillan Bloedel, then with over 20,000 and operating across a broad spectrum of businesses requiring both blue- and white-collar employees, there is absolutely no reason why the federal civil service, with about 260,000 employees across Canada, could not accommodate most disabled veterans for continuing employment.

Successful job retention with the pre-disability employer, in this case the Government of Canada, following the onset of a mental or physical health impairment requires three components that are a basis for any return to work effort anywhere in the world. These are creativity, because no two disability situations are alike and can vary based on a number of circumstances; collaboration between various stakeholders; and open and transparent communication.

At this point in time, assuming that Bill C-81, Canada's national accessibility legislation, is proclaimed, its requirement to hire 5,000 individuals with disabilities over the next few years creates a unique employment opportunity for disabled veterans. It does, however, require flexibility and creativity on the part of the Public Service Commission, thinking outside the box to review and remove, if necessary, bureaucratic impediments that take any number of forms from unnecessary educational requirements to more flexibility in delivering additional training.

There are a couple of suggested concrete steps. Effective job retention with the pre-disability employer requires early intervention, an absolutely necessary first step to ensure that psychosocial compounding of, let's say, a physical impairment does not render the individual ultimately unemployable.

● (1540)

Individuals who acquire a mental or physical health impairment, regardless of causation, need to be triaged successfully at the earliest possible time. This simply means determining the likelihood of continued employment with the old job, or if a change will be necessary, which could mean retraining or redeployment to another position either within DND or the broader federal civil service.

The current interface between DND and Veterans Affairs is often detrimental to the continuing employment prospects of disabled veterans, and could be dramatically improved. This is not to say that landing a job within the federal civil service is the final piece in the puzzle. When 70% of disabled individuals currently hired into the federal civil service don't make it through their probationary period, systemic issues well beyond this conversation need to be addressed.

Based on experience in many other jurisdictions, we are certainly most willing to provide a number of additional concrete steps that could contribute towards achieving much improved socio-economic outcomes for disabled veterans.

Thank you very much.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our final intervention in this first hour will be from VETS Canada. VETS stands for Veterans Emergency Transition Services. We have Madam Debbie Lowther.

Please, ma'am, the floor is yours.

Ms. Debbie Lowther (Chair and Co-founder, VETS Canada): Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen of the committee, my name is Debbie Lowther, and I am the chair and co-founder of Veterans Emergency Transition Services, known commonly as VETS Canada. Here with me today is Walter Semianiw, who sits on our board of directors, but who was also responsible for developing the priority hiring policy at Veterans Affairs Canada.

Thank you for the invitation to appear before you today, and thank you for undertaking this very important study regarding the hiring of veterans for public service positions. It's a privilege for me to be here to share some of our insight, as it pertains to the topic.

VETS Canada is a federally registered national charity dedicated to addressing the immediate needs of veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces and the RCMP who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless or are otherwise in crisis. We were founded in 2010, and are located across the country, with hundreds of dedicated volunteers who directly assist veterans. Most of our volunteers are veterans themselves.

With our headquarters in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, and our volunteers across the country, we have responded to over 7,000 requests for assistance from veterans and their families, from coast to coast to coast, 24 hours a day and seven days a week, including holidays. We are currently taking between 200 and 300 requests for assistance each month.

The veterans we work with are at various stages of their transition from military service to civilian life, and we have worked with many who have been part of the priority hiring process. Additionally, many of our veteran volunteers have also been part of priority hiring. To date, however, none of these veterans have been successful in obtaining employment in the public service through the priority hiring process.

When some of those veterans who competed unsuccessfully for positions questioned why they were not chosen, they were usually given a very vague answer, something along the lines of, “You weren't a good fit.” One of our veteran volunteers competed for a position with Veterans Affairs Canada through priority hiring. When he was unsuccessful, he asked why he didn't get the job. He was told it was felt that he didn't have sufficient experience in communicating with senior military officers. This veteran served for 23 years and released at the rank of major. For those of you unfamiliar with military ranks, a major is a senior officer.

It's our belief that the priority hiring policy is strong. It seems, in theory, to meet the needs of veterans, but in the end, the final hiring decision is left to hiring managers who have no obligation or interest in actually hiring veterans. We believe that when the policy is strong and the process is good but the implementation is poor, perhaps we need to move toward having targets, or quotas, similar to our neighbours to the south. It's much easier to determine the success of a program or initiative when there are measurable outcomes in place.

There has been much debate about the Government of Canada's sacred obligation to those who have fought and been injured for our country. We believe that the men and women who are willing to put their lives on the line for their country must know that the nation that sent them into harm's way will be there for them when their service is complete. One small way that we, as a country, can fulfill the sacred obligation is to provide employment for those who are employable.

Mr. Chair, thank you. I look forward to any questions from the committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll start now with our seven-minute round of questions, beginning with Monsieur Drouin.

[*Translation*]

You have seven minutes, please.

[*English*]

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to all of you who are hearing me.

I'm not really interested in success stories; I am interested in what's not happening on the ground and, Ms. Lowther, I think you've laid it out for us. I'm certainly flying at 10,000 feet and we don't always see what's really happening.

Mr. Zimmermann, when you said that 70% don't make it through the probation period, that's seriously an issue. When you say that, I think about the fact that they're not properly welcomed into their environment.

In your experience and in your studies, what steps could we take to ensure that those who are hired right now make it through their probation period and that we reduce that number? I ask that because 70% is too high.

Feel free, Ms. Lowther, to jump in.

● (1550)

Mr. Wolfgang Zimmermann: The 70% refers to individuals with disabilities and the real challenge in this regard is that is very consistent. If you look at the employment equity numbers for individuals with disabilities, the outflow rate right now in the federal civil service—and we're talking about an organization as you know of 260,000 employees—is that for every individual with a disability who's hired, two of them leave the federal civil service.

Where I think all of you can play a tremendous role is that we are lacking within the federal civil service, as with a number of other organizations—and some are very different—a culture of accommodation. That's really the key. When you look at the number of individuals with disabilities, 80% of individuals acquire their impairment during their working life. They don't get accommodated. They frankly get turfed.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Do you know of organizations where they got it right and their performance is not 70% but much better and they provide proper accommodations to ensure that disabled individuals keep working in the organizations?

Mr. Wolfgang Zimmermann: There are a good number of organizations.

A good example of that is Canada Post. Some seven or eight years ago, they established a national program where they're saying no individual who acquires an impairment is going to lose their job. The Irving Group in the Maritimes is a private sector organization that does a tremendous job in this regard, whether it's a mental health issue or a physical health issue.

What that does is.... Particularly in large organizations, one day you may need to accommodate someone with a mental health issue, and the next day it could be a physical health issue—it could be cancer—which require you to address the challenge of episodic disabilities. You build a tool kit within the organization and then you gradually open up the door to the organization becoming conditioned to retiring individuals with disabilities from the outside.

I just happen to understand the interface between Veterans Affairs and DND because I had the privilege of spending over six years on the Veterans Affairs advisory committee in the late 1990s.

We have some huge opportunities and you folks can drive this.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Okay. Thank you for that.

Mr. Richards, in your testimony, you said that the union voted against recognizing years of service as seniority, essentially. Were you part of that campaign to.... I'm assuming somebody said they'd have to bring it to a vote. Do you know if members of the said union were properly educated on the reason that you wanted this?

Mr. Andrew Richards: My understanding is that it was in the last collective agreement. For whatever reason it got written out of, or somehow was written out of, the current agreement.

The union put out an email and information and said that they were taking, in their opinion, the unprecedented step of putting it to a vote. They don't usually put things like this to a vote. The union would just take a position or a stand and represent the bargaining agent in the negotiations. They put it to a vote.

If the wording in the collective agreement should remain as it is, in which case it is not included service in the federal public sector, or if they should try to reword it to put it back in, to include it, that vote went out. I don't know the exact number of border services officers across Canada but there were 1,150, give or take, who voted no and 850 voted yes. That represents, as a total, less than 50% of any and all eligible voters.

I've talked to officers and many have apologized to me. They said that they didn't see how this could happen, that it seemed ridiculous. Fair enough. There were other officers who said they didn't even hear about the vote, and they wondered when it happened, how it went out, and how the information was disseminated.

There was also misinformation. The Treasury Board policy for annual leave is on a scale. It's not day for day. There are different classes of services—regular force, reserve, reserve overseas deployed. There's a whole scale and you submit your paperwork. If you get hired in the public sector, you submit your paperwork from the military and they calculate it and give you annual leave based on that. It's not day for day.

I don't think that was clear. The biggest concern, unfortunately, on the part of a lot of officers was about losing seniority, in picking their holidays or their shifts, to guys from the military, guys who chose to be in the military. There have been negative comments made publicly, out loud on the work floor, amongst officers. That's where I get the animosity. They tell us that, after all, we chose to be in the military, and the military's not the public sector, so it doesn't count. They say we were never in the union or part of the collective agreement.

I don't know what the information was. I don't think that if it had been better disseminated.... Only a fraction of the officers would actually be military members. For military members, not all their service counts, so you're talking a fraction of a fraction.

● (1555)

Lieutenant-General (Retired) Walter Semianiw (National Director, VETS Canada): I'll make a tough comment here. When we were developing a policy in 2011, it was the public service union that came to the department and would not allow us to expand the policy. All they would agree to at the time was to open it up for medically released veterans, who then had a statutory priority, as opposed to a regular priority. The public service union said no, they were not going to push it, and the public service itself agreed. The public service did not want it to go beyond medically released veterans.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go now to Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Welcome, everyone. Thanks for your testimony so far.

Mr. Richards, I'm a fellow BCIT grad, although I suspect I graduated many years before you.

When you left the military, did you go straight into border security, or was there a gap period? Did you leave to take that position?

Mr. Andrew Richards: I stayed part time in the reserves, but very part time. As you know, the reserves can be full time or part time.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Did you know about the opening and then you left the military to do it? I want you to walk us through your hiring process into the public service.

Mr. Andrew Richards: I'd finished my last tour in Afghanistan. I was looking to get married and settle down so I started to explore options. I worked part time as a paramedic with the B.C. ambulance service out in the Fraser Valley and I started to look at some other opportunities. Everything seemed to require post-secondary education to even get in the door. Lots of places love that you have experience in the military, overseas or peacekeeping, whatever it may be, but getting in the door without post-secondary credentials in this day and age is really difficult, so I decided to go back to school.

They happened to be starting up that program, and I took it. While on the program, I started applying for public sector jobs but I did it as an external applicant. Basically, I was no more or less than a civilian when I applied.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Was CBSA the only one that called you back?

Mr. Andrew Richards: They were the first.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Can you walk us through the process with CBSA? What was the longest process? Was it an easy process to follow?

Mr. Andrew Richards: At that time, they had just developed a new officer induction training program, which came into effect in 2013. I was one of the first graduates of Rigaud on that program, which had recently been revamped. It was about a year-long process. I found that there were a lot of times where paperwork and things were redundant because I had already done it in the military, things like applying for a 10-year background check for a secret-level security clearance when I already held a top-secret clearance.

When I was away with the military, I might receive an email on my phone as a corporal in barracks saying they needed documents filled out and returned to the recruiting group by the end of the week—this when I had no access to a computer or a printer—or I'd get an email telling me I was scheduled for an interview at such and such a time, when I wasn't even in the province.

The military was the most accommodating in that—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: —but the bureaucracy was not.

When you left the military, was there any instruction, any training, on transitioning or how to apply for public service jobs?

Mr. Andrew Richards: No, sir.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That's an interesting comment. I've talked to bureaucrats who told me they had a concierge service to help vets transition into the public service. When I asked if they told the vets about it, and if they gave them the pertinent paperwork, the bureaucrats said they hadn't, because it would involve too much paperwork. I think this sums up government entirely.

You mentioned the minimum qualifications. You've been overseas, and it would seem that the training you had should count for a lot more than—no offence to anyone who may be listening—a history degree or a Bachelor of Science or something, but apparently it doesn't, and that's an impediment for you and a lot of other vets applying for public service jobs.

Are there any other qualification levels that are thrown up to, perhaps, block vets from accessing public service jobs? Do the people making the hiring decisions sometimes use these qualifications to steer toward people they want as opposed to hiring vets?

Ms. Lowther, could you comment on that as well?

Mr. Andrew Richards: When I see internal postings now, they still have essential elements and experience, and they still say "or relevant military experience". But how would you take relevant military experience, say, in Kandahar or Sarajevo, and apply that when they want knowledge of databases specific to the employment or specific knowledge of legislative authorities and enforcement domestically? You obviously can't have that experience unless you've already been in that job or gone to school for that job. You may have other experience enforcing other types of legislative authorities internationally—narcotics or something in Panjwai, Kandahar—but you don't have it domestically.

I don't know if they do it deliberately as a barrier. It definitely seems it's a barrier—taking what you've done and making it fit through this, even if it's just a filter, to apply on a government web page, and if it doesn't get through the filters for the keywords....

● (1600)

Ms. Debbie Lowther: It seems, from the feedback we have received from veterans who have questioned why they were not chosen for positions, that the answers they get are very vague, as I mentioned. Usually they're told that they just weren't a good fit. They're not given a very specific answer. In a few instances we have heard from our veterans that they found out after the fact that somebody else was given the job, and it was clear that they were the favoured candidate from the beginning. I think there are issues with the hiring managers not wanting to hire veterans.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: This is something we've heard from other witnesses. It's not just specific to veterans; it's throughout the public service. We've heard it quite often.

Ms. Debbie Lowther: I think Mr. Zimmermann alluded earlier to the cultural shift. It is a difficult transition when you're coming from the military to the public service. Military life is much more structured, and we have had experience with veterans who have obtained employment, not with the public service and not through priority hiring, but they found it very difficult because of the cultural shift. I think that—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm almost out of time, so can I ask the two of you a quick question?

Should we have some form of reverse onus for the departments around why they're not hiring the applicant who's a veteran?

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: That's already done, Mr. Chair. That's already in the process right now. The Public Service Commission is responsible for overseeing and monitoring the process. In our opinion, that's not the challenge. At the end of the day, the issue is why that hiring manager should hire a veteran. It's not a political issue.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Of course not.

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: Every party supports it. It's about getting the individual hired. It's an implementation issue. It has been for the last eight years.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Yes, but we're hearing the qualifications are being used to steer toward other candidates.

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: That's a fact, and the policy says it shouldn't. The policy is clear that if you meet the qualifications, competencies and skills, you should be the one who is picked. That's what we developed in 2011.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Is it more about how the job offer is written, that the qualifications aren't the barrier...?

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: It is more about how the hiring manager, at the end of the day, gets to say no about you when they phone back to the Public Service Commission to say, "I didn't pick Mr. McCauley for the following reasons." That's where it ends.

If there were targets, it would be very different. Ask the Department of Veterans Affairs how many veterans are in the department. Between 2012 and 2014 there were only 75 veterans in a department of 3,000.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Madam Laverdière for seven minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I'm a former public servant, although I was in the foreign service. My definition may not be traditional, but for me, everybody who serves the country is a public servant. Anyway, that's my point of view.

I'll switch to French now. I prefer "public servant" in English, because it sounds better than "*fonctionnaire*".

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): I totally agree with you.

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: Just as "soldier" does vice "*fonctionnaire*".

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I have many questions to ask. The first is for Ms. Lowther and Mr. Semianiw.

I represent a downtown Montreal riding with a lot of homelessness, a lot of homeless people. We know that situation in itself is an impediment to getting a job. You work with veterans who are homeless or are about to be. I assume that complicates the situation.

Do you think the government is doing enough for veterans in terms of housing assistance and social housing?

● (1605)

[*English*]

Ms. Debbie Lowther: Thank you very much for the question.

My honest opinion is no; I think we could do more. When it comes to homelessness among veterans, there's a lot more we could do. Rental subsidies would be a great first step when it comes to housing specifically, but you're right that the homelessness does present an additional challenge, especially as it pertains to moving on to meaningful employment.

The short answer is no. I think the government could do more when it comes to homelessness among veterans.

[*Translation*]

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: I think the issue is very simple. Right now, the process is too complex. If we add to that veterans who are suffering from mental health problems or other issues, the system gets even more complicated. It becomes impossible to make sense of it, primarily because it is a very complex system.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: That brings me to a comment you made, Mr. Zimmermann. You talked about bureaucratic impediments and difficulties in the relationship with the Department of National Defence and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Could you elaborate on that?

[*English*]

Mr. Wolfgang Zimmermann: Sure, I'd be happy to.

In my view, there needs to be probably a significant change, I would argue, in the roles between DND and Veterans Affairs in this regard. That is what I referred to earlier with respect to the whole question of triaging. I want to give you an example, perhaps, in a very similar world across the country, which is the workers' compensation world around the globe. For an individual who acquires an impairment of some sort, whether it's mental or physical, within four weeks generally a determination is made whether there is a significant likelihood of the individual being able to go back to work or not. Based on that, an intervention strategy is developed, which has an expectation of return to work, rather than letting individuals languish at DND and then finally and ultimately transitioning them into the Department of Veterans Affairs.

If you do not have an early intervention strategy then of course all of the challenges start to accumulate, which my colleagues here on the panel have referred to, in terms of psychosocial compounding, depression and anxiety, and ultimately you head down the path of poverty, homelessness and addiction. We see that almost 30% of Canadians living in poverty are individuals with disabilities, and a good chunk of them are individuals who have come out of the armed forces and were never successfully reintegrated.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I apologize if these are personal comments, but I want to say that we see this in Montreal, especially in my riding, Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

It makes me think of a report published in 2015 by the National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman. It said that the National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman and the Veterans Affairs Ombudsman were of the opinion that the Canadian Armed Forces were in the best position to decide whether a medical release was attributable to service or not under Bill C-27. I would like to know everyone's opinion and whether you agree with that.

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: Yes, I agree. When the policy was being developed, in 2011, that was one of the questions asked. It was a matter of determining whether the policy should be entrusted to National Defence or Veterans Affairs Canada. At that time, the decision was made to give that responsibility to National Defence, but, owing to laws, National Defence did not want to take it. I think that entrusting it to National Defence would be the best option.

● (1610)

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm afraid we're out of time, but hopefully you will have another opportunity.

We'll now go to Madam Mendès for seven minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

At the very least, I will try to continue for a little while in French, like Ms. Laverdière. I may switch to English afterwards.

Mr. Zimmermann, you brought up the advisory committee you sat on in the late 1990s. I would like to know whether any recommendations came out of that advisory committee on the transition from military to civilian life, especially in employment and, if so, what they were.

[*English*]

Mr. Wolfgang Zimmermann: Well, it was between 2004 and 2010 that I was part of the committee. The recommendations at that time were exactly the same as I think I'm presenting today, that individuals should not be allowed to depart from DND without a very clear game plan going forward, one that has return to work and continued employment as a critical element of the expected outcome. I mean, we all identify with what we do for a living, because being successfully employed is what gives us our basis for economic participation, for social participation and for our own psychological health in the workplace. My view—and I think the recommendation in those days as well—is that there simply has to be a level of creativity brought to this.

What I saw in those days, and what we continue to see, is that sure, somebody who has served may not go into an office tower down the road, but why would they not be retrained for a career within Parks Canada or CBSA? Why would they not be retrained for a career, as Mr. Richards said, within Fisheries and Oceans or as a labour inspector within the labour program at Employment and Social Development? There is no reason. The key is to bring creativity and outside-the-box thinking to this as opposed to “this is how we've always done it”.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: I completely agree with you. I do think that creativity is about looking beyond the simple job description of traditional public servants we may have in mind. It is about looking further.

While they are still active, before they become veterans, military members mostly need to be reassured by their employer—National Defence—that, when it comes to their mental and physical health, they are capable of entering the labour market. That is also one of the problems. If an individual is physically or mentally fragile at the end of their military career, before transitioning to a civilian job, it is certain that conditions will not really be in their favour. Am I wrong?

Is there a period at the end of a military career when the military member is guided through what we may refer to as “recovery” or, at the very least, a period of recovery to good health to enter civilian life? Is that done?

[*English*]

Do you get my question? At the end of their military service, do they get, not just some training but some health care, mental and physical, to ensure that they are ready to enter civilian life?

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: No. I released in 2015, so I am probably the most recently released individual here and I can tell you I was responsible for the process. No. What you will hear from the leadership of the Canadian Armed Forces is that men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces are now released with everything in place. We're not seeing that.

I spoke to a veteran only last week who still did not have her pension or severance pay organized. She was already out and she was struggling with mental health issues. I'm saying this in English to be very clear.

● (1615)

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: That's absolutely fine.

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: Men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces are still being released today, even though you hear otherwise, without having everything in place.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: What is the concierge for then?

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: When you hear what's about to happen, this is down the road. It's not in place today. The concierge is going to happen years down the road. It's being trialled in Borden right now.

It doesn't matter if you're released in any other place across the Canadian Armed Forces, you still have the same release process I went through three or four years ago.

It's a great-sounding program, but it's not there, so at VETS Canada, we still see men and women who are struggling with mental health issues.

I agree with Mr. Zimmerman. There is a group of individuals we need to pay more attention to prior to their being released. They should be held from being released until they have everything in place—the convalescence and the support. If not, it's disastrous on the other side.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Thank you very much. That's exactly the point of my question.

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: That's why I said it in English.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Thank you.

I asked about the concierge service because it looks very nice on paper. It sounds like a great idea.

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: It's only in Borden.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: What does it do?

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: What it's supposed to do—and it makes sense, as was mentioned—is to have someone who will work with you in the most difficult and complex cases, maybe one or two years prior to your release, to get all the pieces in place so that when you do leave, everything is ready.

[*Translation*]

For example, we may be talking about physicians or medical specialists.

[*English*]

You need your specialists in complex cases, be they psychiatrists, psychologists, physiotherapists—

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Medication.

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: Yes, medication.

On January 21, when I left the Canadian Armed Forces, the Canadian Armed Forces didn't call me and ask, “How are you doing today?”

I was gone. I was out. I had left the day before. That's the message I gave everyone I worked with. The day after you release, you're on your own.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Veterans Affairs didn't pick it up?

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: No.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: At no time?

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: No.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Mesdames et messieurs, welcome to your House of Commons.

First of all, let me thank you sincerely for what you have done for our country. Yes, you are civil servants. You are among the best civil servants, and I want to pay respect to you all.

Through you, I want to salute the people in my riding.

[*Translation*]

In my riding, Louis-Saint-Laurent, I'm just a few kilometres away from the Valcartier military base, which is duly represented by my colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. Of course, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of veterans in my riding.

Ten years ago, I initiated proceedings for the road going to the Valcartier military base to be renamed Bravoure Road, like the one in Ontario.

We think about you every day, as we enjoy the benefits of freedom and democracy. Thank you for the service you have provided and continue to provide to our country.

[*English*]

Mr. Zimmerman, you talked a few minutes ago about going from the field to the tower. When a soldier has passed all his life in the field, fighting for democracy and all of that, and then he has a job in a tower, in downtown Ottawa or elsewhere, there is a big challenge for all you guys to address.

In your experience, where do you stand on that? Do you think we offer enough help to those people who have to address civilian life after living in the army?

Mr. Wolfgang Zimmermann: Certainly based on my experience, for those who have acquired a physical or mental health impairment, the support is not there.

I want to give you a bit of an illustration of that. When I look at workers' compensation systems around the world that deal with the same type of issue—in this case it's industrial accidents, although the same applies on the non-occupational side where we don't have the same structure—all of their intervention strategies are targeted at three months.

We know that when an individual with a disability has been out of work for three months, their chances of ever going back to work are dramatically reduced. That is just something that happens. It's a function of who we are as human beings. You lose your self-confidence and you are depressed.

From a structural point of view, we could be doing a hell of a lot more in this area, but we almost have a system set up that mitigates against individuals successfully reintegrating.

We have the same problem, as I said earlier, in the workers' compensation world, where if an individual has been out of work for a year, their chances of ever going back to work are down to less than 10%.

● (1620)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: What do you think we should do to address that?

Mr. Wolfgang Zimmermann: I think that comes down to the point Mr. Semianiw made earlier that the structures need to be in place at DND so there is a type of support for the individuals so that they are being looked after. It would be a mentorship-type program. I want to expand on this a bit.

The greatest success in getting individuals who have been on social security for a long time back to work has been in the Commonwealth of Australia, and that has been by providing individuals with job coaches, in the same way as, in this case, providing individuals with support so that they are basically not left hanging out there. That is really the approach.

Yes, it's probably going to take some significant resources up front, but at the end of the day, as a society and for the individuals, we'll more than recover not only the financial cost associated with that but also the tremendous human social suffering cost that's associated with collective failure.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to our final five-minute intervention, and then I'll be suspending so we can get our next panel in here.

Madam Yip, you have five minutes.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you for coming.

Mr. Zimmerman was talking about mentorship and job coaches, and I think that's a great idea.

On that note, Ms. Lowther, you talked about targets. On one hand, Mr. Zimmerman is talking about changing the structure and then, on the other hand, you're talking about targets. What do you think would be more effective, or do you think having a combination of both in place would help?

Ms. Debbie Lowther: It certainly wouldn't hurt to have a combination of both in place.

My suggestion for targets is, as I mentioned, that when you have measurable outcomes, it's much easier to determine success. If government departments were challenged with hiring, say, 22% of veterans among their new hires, there would be some accountability there. I think targets are not a bad idea.

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: You'd have to hold deputies accountable.

Mr. Wolfgang Zimmermann: Certainly I would very much support the notion of targets, because what gets measured gets done, and what gets measured and gets done drives behaviour. Hopefully, if we drive behaviour long enough, ultimately we will change the culture of the place.

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: The United States has been through this journey long before we have. They are now at targets because going out just using a policy process machinery to try to make it work, which is good, didn't work.

At the end of the day, when they're in place, what do you do with bureaucracy? As much as it doesn't want them— it didn't want them in 2011; we asked for targets—you put targets in place, and you have the deputies responsible for their targets to the clerk.

Ms. Jean Yip: Mr. Richards, do you have any comments on this?

Mr. Andrew Richards: I can't really comment on that side of things because I guess I'm on the flip side. I'm the person who left the military of my own choosing. I know it's very different psychologically and mentally if you decide you're ready to transition, and you've released voluntarily and moved onto a career versus.... A lot of my friends who have been diagnosed with PTSD, have service dogs or were injured or wounded didn't want to leave, but they were medically released. It's a different headspace. I can't comment so much on that process, because I knew I wanted other career goals, to have a family and settle down, and I worked towards it. It seems there were a lot of barriers external to that that came up.

● (1625)

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: But like you, they wanted one thing, and that was purpose. With purpose, it brings a lot of pieces together. It's clearly shown on the research. With purpose, mental health is better. Many things are better. I'm sure Wolfgang would agree. It all comes together, and that's what this is all about, finding purpose for veterans who have so much more to give to the country after their time in service.

Mr. Andrew Richards: I guess I would agree with you.

One of my best friends was medically released, and he's on a pension. He has a service dog. He had a lot of issues. The marriage is falling apart. He was talking of flying out here yesterday, and his question was, “How different are you from the military? You're still in a uniform; you're still protecting Canada and you still carry a sidearm. You really didn't do much different; you just did it differently." Yes, I would agree with that, the purpose.

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: It's not about getting money. You can give me millions of dollars. That's not purpose. It's what do I wake up every morning for? That's where this policy is so important, to kind of bring to life.

Ms. Jean Yip: I don't know if you can answer this in one minute, but last September the president of the Public Service Commission of Canada said that there are issues of a mismatch between the way veterans sometimes describe their experience and the skills that they've acquired in the military.

Do you believe that there's a mismatch? What can be done to improve the mismatch or the perception of a mismatch?

LGen (Ret'd) Walter Semianiw: Governments have been working for decades on a skills translator to try to figure out how to equate what we did into civilian life. How is an infantry soldier in the armoured corps...? It can be done; it's not that it can't be. It comes back to what Wolfgang and you had said, which is that you need someone to translate that and be the concierge to sit down and say what it is you need to say.

[*Translation*]

For example, I was part of a unit during the war in Afghanistan, in 2005.

[*English*]

What does that mean on a civilian street?

It can be done; it's not that it can't be. It's just never been done.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

To all of our witnesses, I want to thank you very much for being here. More than that, I want to thank you for your service to your country.

Should you have additional information that you wish to share with our committee as we continue with this study, I would encourage you to send that information to our clerk, to help us with our study. There's never enough time to give witnesses a chance to tell their side of the story and give examples that would be of benefit to the committee. You've done a wonderful job. I thank you for that.

You are now dismissed.

Colleagues, we will suspend for a couple of minutes while we wait for our next panellists to approach the table.

● (1625)

(Pause)

● (1630)

The Chair: Colleagues, we are back in public again.

We have two individuals with us today. I want to welcome both of them.

We have, as individuals, Danielle Boutilier and Katherine Lamy.

I understand that Madam Lamy will be going first. Both of you have five-minute opening statements. After those, we will go into our round of questioning from all of our committee members.

Madam Lamy, you're up.

Ms. Katherine Lamy (Nurse Practitioner Captain (Retired), As an Individual): For those who don't know me, my name is Katherine Lamy. I served 21 and a half years in the Canadian Armed Forces. I served in both the primary reserves and the regular force. During that time I completed various courses, positions, taskings and deployments, more specifically the ice storm in 1998; Operation Athena, Roto 3 in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 2005; and Roto 6 in Kandahar, Afghanistan, from 2008 to 2009.

During my service I suffered several injuries, including from a special duty area.

During my service, I noticed how many veterans were ill-prepared to transition from military to civilian life. The longer members serve in the military, the more they become institutionalized. By that I mean many become accustomed to having much, if not most, of their normal day-to-day activities coordinated and managed by the system. The following is a short list of the most common of these, but not all: medical care; prescriptions and payment for; referrals to specialists, such as ortho, neurology, etc.; medical travel; medical assessments; follow-ups; diagnostic imaging; dental assessments and work; rehab for addictions, such as with alcohol and drugs, including seeking approval for and payment; their pay is locally managed; their kit and equipment is provided; their moves related to postings and the coordination of payment for; job security, generally no need to create a resume or complete an interview, etc.; financial issues, often coordinated and managed with the chain of command, the member and a financial adviser; wills and power of attorney; and many more.

Most of the time, all of that is coordinated in the background without having the member overly involved. It's quite seamless. As a result, the member becomes dependent and reliant on the system, and thus institutionalized for those. When members transition out, there's no one and no process in place to help guide and assist members through it. I know this because I went through it. I was being rehabilitated post-operatively for a hip injury that required extensive work and I had to lift and carry all of my kit and equipment. I know from a clinician standpoint—I'm a nurse practitioner—that this should never have happened as it contributed to further damage to the hip and it required additional surgery.

Further, no one tells members to save up money for their release because it can take several months for the pension, earnings loss benefit and SISIP to kick in and be in place to provide payments as a medical release. This can be quite stressful for the members and their families as many have to pay a mortgage, rent, groceries, car insurance, child support and so forth, and they may default on these. Banks and creditors are not so forgiving when you owe them money, and despite your telling them you're waiting for these payment sources to be in place, they rarely show sympathy.

As a nurse practitioner, I've treated patients in both the military and civilian health care systems. Veterans releasing, and once transitioned, often have heightened stress and anxiety levels. Some are unable to work immediately in the coming months and some not at all. Others are deciding if they can return to school and if they will be able to be successful in graduating and finding the right job. Others are simply too injured, psychologically and/or physically, so that returning to the workforce is simply not an option. As a result, the income and employment disparity becomes extremely apparent within the first few months of transitioning out of the military.

Once members are out of the military, they do not have that safety cushion of a system looking after them. Some have pre-existing addiction issues that have never been fully addressed nor properly or effectively treated. This can contribute to losing their home, family, kids, job, car and much more. It becomes a perfect storm.

What I ask from you today is to initiate and coordinate a mechanism to be in place where veterans are not left to fend for themselves when transitioning out of the military. I was medically released in February 2018. Despite being in school to become a nurse practitioner, I too struggled with my injuries. I was fortunate my colleagues and staff in the nursing program at the University of Ottawa were extremely supportive. Despite this, no one from my chain of command contacted me in my last six months in the military to see if I needed any kind of support.

● (1635)

I now work for both the Queensway Carleton Hospital and Spartan Wellness. At Spartan Wellness, we assist and guide veterans with some of their medical needs. Veterans need this kind of guidance and assistance to have the proper tools in their tool box to transition out from the Canadian Armed Forces. Otherwise, this is a failure of leadership at all levels.

The Chair: Thanks you.

Ms. Boutilier, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Danielle Boutilier (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Danielle Boutilier. I'm from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people, known as Unama'ki.

[*Translation*]

I will continue in English, but feel free to ask your questions in French.

[*English*]

I'm here today as the wife and caregiver of an injured veteran who was released. The uniform is my public service uniform that I've worn for almost 20 years. I'm here on other business.

I'm here today to speak to my experiences as the wife of an injured veteran, mother of four and a public service manager. As the wife of an injured soldier, I only have a few things to offer. The transition to life after service is a very long road and without the support of your family, a network of friends and supportive people, it is sometimes overwhelming. The fact that troops are released with a list of courses that most people cannot decipher and a CV that was written with a template from Microsoft Word software, and have no pre-release training on how to apply for a public service job or how to sell themselves in an interview became very apparent to me during my husband's release from the military.

With his transition and vocational rehab through JPSU, I made a conscious decision to help others who were transitioning find meaningful work within my own organization, as well as to assist them with the tools to become a public servant: CV writing, public service courses, training and mock interviews, and the introduction to all the non-government organizations like VETS Canada, that Ms. Lowther spoke of before. She and I know each other because our family had to use her service.

I am fortunate enough to have been in the public service for 20 years and have participated in many selection processes, both as the interviewer and the interviewee. I realize that the way we screen and the questions we ask during the interview process look for as much information as possible. The more you say, the more likely you are to hit all the points they're asking for in the question. Military people do not do this. It's inculcated into them to cut out the fluff and get straight to the point. This training works and is tried and true for them in their role within the CF; however, it severely hinders their CV writing skills and interview skills. As a public service manager, when I ask them to tell about an unsafe situation in the work environment, and they ask if I mean in Canada, and you say, yes, they say there are none.

I feel that part of their release should be mandatory training in both these important skills. These optional trainings are offered, and I am sure you do use them, but I feel that a quantitative review of the number of released members compared to the number of these optional trainings that are given and taken should be mandatory.

Vocational rehab is one of the most successful programs offered via JPSU, the joint personnel support units in the Canadian Forces. It allows members the chance to "try on" an employer and the public service gains a workforce and a skill set that is rich with talent. One of the roadblocks for members transitioning to the public service during vocational rehab is the fact that their service number is not recognized as a PRI meaning that they cannot complete online training with the Canada School of Public Service or use MyKey for any of the encryption that's required.

As an example, an orderly room sergeant with 25 years' experience cannot come on vocational rehab training within the public service without a PRI to obtain a MyKey, and can't work as a timekeeper for the Phoenix pay system because a MyKey is needed to log in and do the job.

To truly transition, you need to receive the given responsibilities and true picture of the role in the public service. It's not being given and only a small portion of the job is given to them. The transition of leave service dates, as Andrew spoke to earlier, takes a long time to happen with the pension centre.

I also feel that the Treasury Board relocation policy needs to be examined. When the veterans hiring policy was released, it allowed CF members to apply for public service jobs as an internal candidate, but this change meant they cannot have the full advantage of an internal candidate. The policy fails to recognize the limitations of the relocation when it comes to members both of DND and the RCMP. There are restrictions for those members when they apply for relocation: years of service and reason for release. A medically released member gets a full relocation, but anyone with under 20 years of service does not.

If a member on his own, like Andrew, finds a position within the public service, makes it through the application process and is the successful candidate, he can be denied the relocation assistance due to having only 10 years of service and no medical release, whereas an internal candidate applying for a job obtains full relocation through the Treasury Board policy. The member, either RCMP or DND, is considered to be an initial appointee to the public service and is offered up to $5,000, with receipts, whereas the internal candidate is eligible for full relocation. This is a huge barrier to candidates who would need to pick up and move their lives across the country for an opportunity when a similar relocation policy was used to move them to their current address.

● (1640)

I also feel I was privileged to be the wife of a soldier. It gave me another perspective on the hiring of veterans and their progress throughout the journey of finding a meaningful role in the public service. I feel that if the Canada School of Public Service were to offer familiarization training on the hiring of veterans, it might alleviate some of the trepidation that may be associated with hiring a veteran. Do they have PTSD? Will they need to be accommodated? How will they fit into my team?

Training on their roles, and the various types of training listed on their MPRR, which is a giant list of courses, would give great assistance, and is something that would not need to be recreated. The Canadian Forces Liaison Council does this now for reservists. The skill set of most veterans in leadership, communication and ethos is beyond the expectations of any manager, but we need to help both the veteran and the public service managers see the value.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll start our seven-minute round of interventions with Madam Ratansi.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Thank you very much. I didn't have a chance to thank the previous group. Thank you for the service you provide to the country.

I'm so glad that we're studying the hiring of veterans, because it opened up a Pandora's box. I didn't even know how much bureaucracy and how many barriers there are. I was under the impression that when you leave the military, whether voluntarily or on a medical basis, there is some sort of a support group, some coaching and a transition. I was looking at some of the things VETS Canada was talking about, in terms of the concierge services. They were talking about financial security, health, life skills and preparedness, etc.

I look at you and see that you have been to Kandahar, and you've done so much work. Your skill sets and resumé should be able to convince the public service that you know how to reconcile, how to take a situation and turn it around and that you have leadership skills. If there is no coach for you, how do you even translate your skill sets into civilian language? You've mentioned some barriers. We need your suggestions on some of the critical challenges to be addressed, the reality of the situation and how we can improve the system.

I think one of the solutions somebody suggested was to put Veterans Affairs and DND together, so that there is a lack of bureaucracy. Would you agree with that?

● (1645)

The Chair: If I may interrupt, you'll probably notice the flashing lights, which means the bells are ringing. We have a vote. However, with unanimous consent of this committee we can continue to sit for at least another 15 or 20 minutes, since it takes less than 10 minutes to get to the House of Commons upstairs.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: It's a 15-minute bell.

An hon. member: It's a quorum call.

The Chair: Is it just a quorum call? Fine. I'm sorry for the interruption.

Please, Madam Ratansi, go ahead.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: That is not a problem.

Ms. Katherine Lamy: What I was told as a medically released member is that you can apply to the public service, but you have to activate your profile, and once you activate your profile, you have only five years to be a priority hire.

A voice: Two.

Ms. Katherine Lamy: Is it two?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: No, it's five.

A voice: Once you activate it.

Ms. Katherine Lamy: That's different from what members are being told.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: No, it's five years. We don't want to argue here.

Ms. Katherine Lamy: Several months back, after I completed my education and passed my licence exam, I applied for a nurse practitioner position with Indigenous Affairs. I have experience working with first nations in Golden Lake and Killaloe, etc. I wasn't even looked at for an interview. I received an email saying, “You don't meet the qualifications,” but there was no explanation. As a veteran, and also as a qualified nurse practitioner who is bilingual and has worked with first nations, it makes me wonder how the selection process happens. It leaves a bit of a bitter taste in your mouth, because you don't know what you're supposed to do. Normally, in the military, if you're not selected for something, you're told why and what you need to improve for the next time.

With Indigenous Affairs, I had no response except, “Thank you for applying. Unfortunately, you don't meet the criteria”, but no explanation.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: There was no debriefing or anything.

Ms. Katherine Lamy: No.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Nobody called you for an interview.

From your own experience, how did you transition from a very structured environment where everything was done for you to an environment where you did not know financial literacy, for example? How did you do that? What did you do? What are the struggles you went through?

Ms. Katherine Lamy: I was in the primary reserve for 10 years. In the primary reserve many people are in school, have a civilian job or may be a homemaker. I always had one foot in the military and one foot out of the military.

I've always been involved with education. I was brought up believing that education is very important, that you need to keep all your doors open, so I was continuing my education. When I was transitioning out, I had a lot of injuries. I struggled with the military because I knew I needed to be assessed by the OSI clinic in Ottawa, and the warrior support centre in Petawawa would not forward my referral to the OSI clinic.

It was a battle. My MO, Dr. Davenport, referred me three times to the OSI clinic, and every time it got stalled at the warrior support centre in Petawawa. I had to go through a case manager on duty through VAC. She got me coordinated with the OSI clinic in Ottawa. They went through a back door to get me in.

There needs to be a more streamlined process for people who need to be referred to the OSI clinic. There needs to be more respect towards vets who are injured, because I will tell you that in Petawawa, you're treated as sick, lame, lazy and a malingerer. It is awful. I have been both staff and patient in that clinic in Petawawa, and there is no respect for injured members.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: This is the military's mentality.

Ms. Katherine Lamy: Yes.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Ms. Boutilier, your husband was in the military. From your perspective, what was his pathway to transition and how did you cope with it?

● (1650)

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: That's important because she speaks about—

The Chair: Be quick, if you could.

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: I can sum it up pretty quickly.

He was injured in 2009 and he was kept in until 2014, when we were unnecessarily moved to Petawawa, because the tick in the box is to get the soldier back to their unit. My four kids and I moved back to Petawawa, bought a house, and on the first weekend we arrived, he said, “I can't do this job anymore.” Then we had to pay out of our own pocket to go back to the east coast so I could continue as a public servant.

From there, it was three years in a museum somewhere at a reserve base to get him to the stage of, “Okay, we'll get you to the 12-year mark so you'll get a full pension instead of a half pension because you have under 10 years.” From that point, he was given vocational rehab at a public service job. He couldn't do it. He couldn't do the physical part of it; he has injuries to his lower body. He couldn't handle public places, the public service transition, and there was no training. If we wanted to do something, it was optional, so on my part, I had to pick up the role.

When he finally got released in December 2014, that was it. There was no pay. The only way we got through Christmas with four kids, our mortgage and our bills, all our payments was with Debbie's group VETS. That was the transition. We waited three and a half months for money to hit the account.

Oh, yes, and then feed....

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next is Mr. McCauley for seven minutes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: It's your game, ladies.

I'm glad someone brought up the five years. My understanding is that it takes five years to activate it, but once you activate it, you have two years. Correct me, anyone, if I'm wrong.

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: As managers, that's what we're told.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Yes.

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: When you activate it, it's not as quick as hit the button and you're on the list. There's a three-month turnaround time.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: But once you activate it, you only have two years.

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: It's two years.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Obviously, that's not practical. My question is—and I was hoping to ask the other gentlemen—should it be 10 years and perhaps four years, or unlimited time? Do you see any practical reason that it should only be two years?

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: Maybe it was for relevancy of skills, but it doesn't really apply, because the way their training works—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: It doesn't sound like skills matter when—

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: Exactly. The way their training works, it's not like that.

Ms. Katherine Lamy: It's just my opinion, but I think it should be indefinite, because a lot of the skills that you acquire in the military you retain for the rest of your life. It really disadvantages veterans if they only have two years once it's activated. For many of us, we're normal people, and some of us live paycheque to paycheque, or are waiting three or four months. That hurts financially.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'll ask other people as well, but I see no reason that it is five and two, and that it can't be 10 and unlimited, 15 and whatever, but I appreciate your feedback. I don't see any reason that we would restrict it.

I have other questions. Specifically, have you run into any language issues of any vets trying to get into the public service? It's going to be a question we'll ask others if they're English only or French only and accessing public service jobs. You may not be the right people to ask, but I'm going to ask everyone as we go along.

Ms. Katherine Lamy: My experience as a non-commissioned member, an NCM, and also as an officer is that what we were often told was that even if you were a corporal but you wanted to get that French-language training, you were out of luck, you were S.O.L. Often, you had to be a master warrant officer or a chief warrant officer or, in the officer corps, a major.

There are many people who want to progress and/or are medically released, but if they're below that rank level, they're out of luck for French-language training.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm specifically trying to get vets who are medically released or who leave the service into the public service. I'm dealing with a group in Edmonton that is a mixed group. Some were medically released, and some left the service. They run into this qualification thing. They have incredible skills, but they can't get even entry level jobs because of the qualifications.

We've heard before from other people appearing here—not vets hiring into public service but just people trying to get into the public service—that roadblocks are put up specifically by the hiring people so they can hire specific..... They call it nepotism, but they're not hiring family. They're hiring their friends or hiring people they prefer, as opposed to the best candidate or the candidate that's required.

Do you think that continues? Is it a big issue—it appears to me it is—that people are using these qualifications to keep out vets who should be hired?

Ms. Katherine Lamy: For me, I can't speculate. I don't know. In relation to when I applied to Indigenous Affairs, I never had an interview, so I don't know. I didn't get any feedback, so I don't know.

I would suppose that it probably does happen in any area, civilian or military. It's about who you know, who you rub elbows with. It does happen. I'm not going to say that it doesn't happen. I've seen it in certain jobs where they know certain people; they do the interview but they were never going to hire that person.

How do you correct that? I don't know.

● (1655)

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: To answer your question about language, here's one of the things in terms of a lot of the transitioning vets who I've worked with, both through work and just because they're friends of ours. When SISIP repays for schooling and things, French-language training is not one of the ones that's on their list, and if you start at that program, then you can't do other things, because they only pay for one program. That is a barrier.

On the question about how they get past that process, again, it all goes back to that template. They're given a template on Word to fill out their MPRR into Word, so every resumé starts with “I'm good at this, this and that”, but it doesn't calculate what the MPRR really means in skills transfer. You need to have a military background to read that. There's no translating that.

When I heard you say “concierge” earlier, you blew my mind, because that is not a thing.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: It's not a thing. Borden might be a pilot, yes, but people are doing this now.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: This is through the Public Service Commission. I've asked why so many vets are not able to get in. I mean, we have 320,000 public servants across the country. Even at a 10% turnover, there are 32,000 openings. Surely.... They say, “Well, we have them set aside in pools.”

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: But the hiring manager—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: We have clipboards full of vets, as you know.

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: As the hiring manager, the first thing you have to do before you run a selection process is that priority search. If in the priority search they don't get through the first screening process, they're done. It doesn't matter how many priorities you have. If they don't meet the translated language from their MPRR to their resumé for the selection process....

Mr. Kelly McCauley: This is a big issue. We were laughing with one of the other witnesses. Treasury Board has actually put out a video on how to apply for a government job. I asked a gentleman from LinkedIn who was here if he had ever heard of any company in Canada requiring a video on how to apply for a job, and he laughed in my face. Like never.... Good Lord, why do we do this? It sounds.... Why would we even need a video or training on how to apply for a government job? It seems that we are making it difficult.

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: Because they have everything done for them.

Ms. Katherine Lamy: We've become institutionalized.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Yes, we're carrying Harry Potter now....

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: Everything is done for a vet. When my husband came home.... Everything was done for him in Petawawa. Their power bill comes off their pay. If they need a couch, they go to the CANEX. When my husband came home to Nova Scotia and saw what our power bill was every three months, he was asking, “What is this? How do we pay this?”

Mr. Kelly McCauley: You're both very well educated and you probably wouldn't be able to figure out how to apply for a government job today, it's so difficult. That's a big part of what we're hoping to do—

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: It's convoluted.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: —in a non-partisan way: to make it streamlined for everyone.

Ms. Katherine Lamy: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. McCauley, I'm afraid you're out of time, but that was good questioning nonetheless.

We'll go to Madam Laverdière.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the two witnesses for their presentations today.

[*English*]

I like to go back to English, as you know, to talk about the public service.

I think it shows a lot that a service number is not recognized as a PRI. There is this kind of separation.... That the major public service, which is to serve one's country abroad at the peril of one's safety and one's life, is not considered public service, I have a huge problem with that.

[*Translation*]

I think there are things that are often part of your testimony and that we have heard before, including the need to train public servants for employment. There seems to be a very significant obstacle to that. Targets should perhaps also be established. I was being told earlier that the United States Department of Energy has a target of 20%, which is pretty impressive. I think that is a key point.

From another perspective, I will ask you to dream a little. We are talking about a transition plan that would be applied before people leave the military to help them face the cultural shock, the fact that they no longer have their daily lives managed, that they have to learn how to answer during an interview—going beyond medical or other needs. It would be about having a transition plan that would be implemented before demobilization.

I would like you to dream for us to see what that might include.

● (1700)

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: First, to become military members, individuals need at least 13 weeks of basic training. Then they need six more months to pursue a specific career. Afterwards, they need two years to rise in the ranks—get their "stripes", as we say—regardless of the career they choose. However, when it is time to leave the military, there is no training as such.

Why is there no mandatory 13 weeks of training, at career's end, when explanations would be provided on how a mortgage, a credit check, or a security clearance transfer works? That is exactly what we need: a transition course, at least two years before people leave the military.

There are courses on learning to use a chainsaw and on other minor matters. There are courses to learn all sorts of things, so why isn't there a transition course?

Ms. Katherine Lamy: I fully agree with Ms. Boutilier.

As she said, a lot of training is required to get into the Canadian Armed Forces and start a career. However, as soon as the individual receives a notice informing them that they're at a high risk in terms of health and that they would be medically released, they have to wait. The government tells us that the wait time should be eight weeks, but that is not the case, as it takes about eight months.

At that point, the individual receives what is referred to as a disclosure package and they can ask to remain in the forces indefinitely, or for three years, or request their release.

As soon as the decision is made,

[*English*]

they facilitate the release very quickly.

[*Translation*]

A commonly used proverb is "out of sight, out of mind". As soon as it is stated that an individual will be medically released, the chain of command could care less. I apologize for using that expression, but the superiors could care less. Over my last six months in the armed forces, no one in my chain of command contacted me to ask whether I needed support or assistance. I want to point out that I was part of a medical unit and am a medical professional.

So I think that, as Ms. Boutilier said, whether the transition course is 13 weeks or six months, a period of two or three years should be offered, not necessarily four years, to facilitate the release.

The person in question could meet with someone to learn how to get a mortgage, how to apply for a health card. If the individual has forms to fill out—for example, to obtain tax credit for disabled individuals—they need assistance. As a nurse practitioner, I see a lot of veterans who need help filling out forms and that's a legitimate issue.

They also have to learn how to present themselves during interviews, how to make a resume, be it for a job in the public service, in a hospital, at Enbridge or elsewhere.

There should be a two or three-year period to facilitate release, if the individual wants it. There is currently nothing.

As for bilingualism, a francophone or an anglophone should be able to learn a second language, and it should be free of charge.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: We have understood from all the testimony today that no transition program is provided to military members who are leaving the armed forces. There is no follow-up. Once it's done, you no longer exist. I assume there isn't much available for families either.

Ms. Katherine Lamy: No, there is nothing.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Okay.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Jowhari, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to open by thanking you for your service and for the support you have given to our servicemen.

As I was sitting back and listening to the testimonies being given, really, I compartmentalized this into three pieces.

One is the period following a service person being given the notice, whether it's two years or six months, etc. We heard about the fact that there is no transition plan in place. We got some recommendations from witnesses, and I'm sure our analysts would be able to document those. There is another piece, after they have been released, and we heard there is nothing there as well. Then we heard from Danielle that once her husband even got a job and he could not handle the job, he had to take a step back and look for an alternative.

To me, the second compartment is, when you transition into a job, what kind of support should there be? Once you are there and when you come out and you are looking to transition into a new role, what kind of supports do you need? There should be a transition plan before, a transition plan to get you into a job, and a transition plan to support—it's not so much a plan for transition as it is a plan for support.

Can you give us some recommendations for these next two compartments, as I call them?

● (1705)

w Ms. Danielle Boutilier: When Adam was injured in Afghanistan in 2009, he was one of the first in the Atlantic provinces to come home injured. After us, they had a family liaison officer, and little *aides-mémoire* were put out.

We had all kinds of help to get him back to the unit. If they did the exact same thing and had a liaison officer to walk you through your new career.... I mean just to check in. It shouldn't be somebody from an insurance company like Manulife or SISIP asking you how many hours you are doing, wanting to push you a little more. The insurance chasing has to stop. There needs to be a sit-down conversation with a career manager, because they have those, or a family liaison officer to walk you through how it is going and whether or not it is working. If it's not, then let's transition you out. Let's help you with the disability paperwork.

I helped Adam through it only because I'm educated. I'm in that world. Paper is my thing. I'm a logistics officer. He could not do that on his own. When I brought up the fact that we were going to apply for a disability pension, I might as well have kicked him, because it took him six months and a bottle of pills and a forty-ouncer, a suicide attempt, to get over that. So, there definitely is a drop of the ball.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: What would be your recommendation?

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: I'd say having a family liaison officer or some kind of career manager. They are already in place in the military. I don't see why, when you're transitioning out or into another career, that can't happen. There is the Canadian Forces Liaison Council that recognizes all those public service jobs that hire reservists and helps them. A part of their mandate should be to help these transitioning members.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Katherine, do you want to add something?

Ms. Katherine Lamy: Yes. I totally agree with what she is saying. Definitely you need a liaison officer to facilitate, maybe for the first six months or a year or two years, to see how they are progressing, because there are some vets who are truly broken. They are so physically and/or psychologically injured that they can't function. I heard stories while I was in service and even now being out and dealing with patients through Spartan Wellness about some of these people who get out. They are just lost because they don't have either a family doctor or a nurse practitioner to get a grip on their health care with them. It goes pear-shaped. A lot of them turn to alcohol and drugs. There is family violence and suicide attempts. People are lost. I can speak from the medical side. We need to work with the provincial ministries of health to ensure that when someone gets out, there is already a family doctor in place or a nurse practitioner, because a lot of this could be helped if they had a family doctor or nurse practitioner. A lot of people have physical injuries for which they need appropriately prescribed narcotics or antidepressants or a referral for physio or massage therapy. There are a lots of things that vets need that are not getting done because they are missing pieces in part of their transitioning out.

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: To add to that, when you transition out, you go to your local military hospital and they give you four or five months' worth of prescription medication. They give you a little card. They say, “See you later and good luck.”

Mr. Majid Jowhari: All at once.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: All at once.

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: Yes, all at once.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: As we are transitioning and putting the support in place—we are hoping to put the support in place—before the release and while released and then on, let's say, a steady state, what kind of handshake do we need between those service providers? I still hear silos, “We need this. We need that.” But there's no one who's taking care of the individual from the point there's a decision made that we're going to release the person to the point that the person is settled. Now the family is taken care of. Now the person is taken care of, and so now I'm disengaging.

What role should there be for someone who can oversee the whole thing from the pre-release to full settlement?

● (1710)

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: You do the reverse of what you did when you entered. They career manage you right through that system. They tell you how to apply for provincial health care. They give you the doctor list. They put you on these things. They can do it when you come in, so I don't understand why they can't do it when you go out.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Okay, great. Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to our five-minute interventions.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ladies, welcome to your House of Commons.

Your French is more than excellent. Earlier, you rightly denounced the fact that military members do not have access to second-language training courses, be it for English or French. That does not apply to you, as you have a great grasp of both languages. I congratulate you and thank you for that. Unfortunately, you will miss the invitation I wanted to extend to you to come to Valcartier, which is not far from my riding, where 99.9% of people have French as their mother tongue, of course.

The comments you exchanged with my colleague Ms. Laverdière are very interesting. If there is something we should learn from your testimony, that would be it. Military members should be prepared six months, one year or two years before they leave the armed forces by being provided with information. You have already identified a few potential topics of training—for example, how to manage a personal budget, a mortgage, an account or how to write cheques, how to find a family doctor and get involved in neighbourhood life. In short, it's about returning to civilian life.

We could argue that these things should be taught in high school, but that's another issue. We are at the federal level, and what happens in schools does not concern us. Sometimes the temptation is strong, but we won't play armchair quarterbacks in this area.

Earlier, you said something that intrigued me. When the rank of major is reached, people can have access to an intensive course for French or English. Do officers have access to training before they leave the military?

Ms. Katherine Lamy: The situation was the same for a soldier or a corporal. There wasn't really a process in place. A lot of pressure was being placed on military members who were given a checklist and it was insisted that it be completed by a specific date. No one helped us.

I had a surgical procedure on my hip and am still taking medication, opioids. I had to carry my equipment myself from the basement to the main floor of my house, put it in my car and take it out of my car at the supply site.

[*English*]

There's not really anything in place. A lot of onus is put on the member. Don't get me wrong. I think the member has to take some ownership but some of these people are so injured, physically or psychologically, they can't manage that.

In my case, I had surgery on my hip. I was on prescribed medication and it was appropriately prescribed, but essentially, especially with opioids, we all know you have to be very careful with them. I was essentially titrated down and just thrown out. Luckily, my family doctor had never taken me off the roster in 15 years so when I got to my family doctor, she said, “What did they do?” She's trying to put the pieces back together, and luckily, now I'm in a much better place both physically and psychologically than when I released.

The other thing I want to highlight with a medical release is it's a blow to someone's ego. It is hard. The way you're trained in the military is you never show weakness. You push through pain. When you're medically released, you're treated differently both by your peers and your chain of command. In my case, like many other people, out of sight, out of mind. That's a failure of the leadership at all levels in the military.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Do you think it would be better to ask civilians instead of military people to teach you how to live in the civilian life, or would you prefer to have instructions from military people, those who have left the military and know what you have to live through? They know exactly how your life is because they were one of you before.

What kind of teacher would you like to have?

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: To me, coming out of the military, it's a combined approach. The JPSU, the joint personnel support unit, which is set up to help transition you out of the Canadian Forces, generally speaking is a cushy post in the military.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Cushy?

● (1715)

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: Very nice and light—easy.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: It's very easy to do.

[*English*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Sorry, I'm not bilingual.

Voices: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: Normally, the ranking is very high.

[*English*]

It's usually warrant officers who are in charge and it's usually corporals coming through. The answer to every question is “yes, sir” or “no, sir” when you're talking to a warrant officer. If you're talking about mortgages or family finances, you don't ever tell the warrant officer any of that.

A combination approach would be the best because you want someone who was there. Just like in the OSI, operational stress injury, rehab that they do through OSISS, it's colleagues; it's people who are trained as peer supporters.

The same approach would work. However, you need civilian people at the same time, because uniformed individuals are much more comfortable when there's no rank involved.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Peterson, you have five minutes.

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for being here, and thank you for your continuing service to our country.

We are specifically studying the hiring of veterans into the public service, but I think what's becoming clear from the testimony today is that the broader picture is the transition to civilian life from the military. A job would be just one component of that.

In my riding of Newmarket—Aurora, there's someone who's recently become a friend of mine. He's an Afghanistan veteran. He went to my high school, much after I did.

When he was discharged, he suffered PTSD. He wasn't diagnosed for the first 18 months. He took the path of self-medication, like many in that situation do. He had trouble. His life almost fell apart. It was obviously stressful on his wife and family. He got the help he needed on his own volition and started an organization that's called Cadence Health and Wellness, which is in Newmarket.

I got to know him through that. I was there for the grand opening when he started, and we got along right away. Going to the same high school was a bond, but it took a while for our relationship to grow and for him to open up. We've had great conversations since. He has a great vision of what this can do for veterans—he's also serving first responders now—in getting them the help they need, such as peer counselling and training, and helping them transition into civilian life as well. He's a visionary, really. He has this grand vision of what's going to happen with his organization, and I for one think it's going to come true. I think he has that commitment and drive.

It was eye-opening for me, as someone who has only been aware of the military not through any personal involvement but from meeting a few people here and there. Being close to Borden, where my riding is, I know a little bit about it. I used to play rugby and soccer against some of the troops who were there visiting from other countries and all that, so I'm familiar with Borden.

The challenges are incomprehensible. I think psychological health is going to be one of the biggest determining factors in whether or not one can transition into civilian life. We have to acknowledge that psychological health problems are as real and as rampant as any physical health problems. We have to figure out how to address those as a society before we can help anyone transition into getting a job.

Now, having a good job, having a purpose and having a mission, of course, are key to mental health; however, if we don't diagnose and treat the underlying problems, holding a job is secondary. A lot of people aren't even capable of it. They're not in a position in their lives where having a job is even probably healthy for them.

I appreciate your testimony. I didn't mean to go on this rant. But what you guys are doing—and what my friend in Newmarket is doing—is a heroic service to our country. I want to thank you for that.

I'll let you make any comments that you might want to add to that before the chair—

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: Tell Chris I said “hi”.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: I will.

Thank you.

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: It speaks volumes that I know who you're talking about because we're all connected, whether it's through a social media group.... That's how I found out about this. It was on Facebook.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Yes.

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: We are all connected. If you ask that community, they're going to tell you what we need. We can't make the change, but if you can help with that, by all means ask us. We will give you the answers. We may not give you plausible answers, but if we can dream and be allowed to dream and give you something, the good idea fairy will probably end up working it into a policy that might work for all of us.

● (1720)

Ms. Katherine Lamy: Yes.

I can only speak for myself, but I'm very happy and thank you very much for letting me come here and speak my truth from my own experience. I've been a trooper and I've been an officer. I'll be very frank. A lot of times we see many of you on TV and you guys fight; it happens in a big family. A lot of times we feel like we're the little guy and that nobody really hears our angst. Nobody really gets it.

Respectfully, many of you speak to colonels and generals, etc., and many times they are so far removed from the boots on the ground that they don't really know or they don't really get it. If you're a colonel or a general, you make a lot of money and you're not worrying about paying for the mortgage as much as a private or a corporal is.

I can't speak for Danielle, but I've been in that position of waiting four months for that cheque. You then have to take money out of your savings that you have from a disability award. Sometimes you have family who lends you money, or maybe you don't buy the brakes that you need for your car.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Katherine Lamy: I think it's so important that you have the opportunity to speak to people who are the boots on the ground, because they will tell you their truth. Many times it's unfiltered. They will tell you the truth and how it is and what they go through, day in and day out.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks again for the information you shared.

I want to get back to hiring vets into the public service. From your point of view, how would it ideally look?

Apparently, we do have this concierge service where, once you apply, you're identified as a priority. Someone does step in and walk you through. To me, it should be made available six months before you're leaving the service, even though it is too much paperwork. It's like, “Here, this is available, so get ready for it.”

From your experience, how would it look, ideally, for you to walk into a regular public service job, not as a scientist, but any of the myriad jobs in Ottawa that are being done right now?

Ms. Katherine Lamy: At all bases, there could be a public service rep who would help vets—whether medically released or otherwise—through the process, to tell them what they need for their application for job, *x*, *y* or *z*, and go step by step to facilitate it. There may still be a lot of paperwork involved, but having that guidance and assistance will alleviate some of the stress. They could also help them identify the key words they need in their resumé to help populate it and show up in the top 10 or the top 15.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Heaven forbid we should add to the bureaucracy, but is there a role somewhere for someone, a type of ombudsman, who says it is BS that this vet has been turned down because he doesn't have the right experience? It's like, they'll turn you down as a driver because you've only driven a tank. It's oversimplifying, but the stuff I've heard back from vets trying to get in is mind-boggling.

Ms. Katherine Lamy: I definitely think debriefing.... I applied for a nurse practitioner position—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Some recourse for them when they've been turned down for bureaucratic silliness....

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: I think the quota idea is a wonderful idea. In a perfect world, if your MPRR—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That was going to be my next question.

How would you see a quota working? My understanding is that down in the United States, it's name and shame. If they don't achieve that, you're named and shamed and your bureaucratic career is over.

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: Yes, they call them out.

Australia does the same thing.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: How do you see the quota working? For instance, would it be that you must hire 20% of vets or you must hire a certain number?

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: Now I'm going to put on my public service hat for a second.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Now that I've bashed the public service....

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: I've received four emails in the last two weeks about performance management appraisals, so there has to be a quota on those. I'm pretty sure if we drove the same system you'd get your number. I know performance bonuses go with those PMAs.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: In a previous study we've seen quotas for first nation business and how the government apparently just ignores the quotas.

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: I'm sure if you affected the bonus it wouldn't.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Do you think that would work?

For instance, how would you set a quota? We have so many qualified vets coming in from all levels, from a service level to major level. How would you set that when there's such a disparate set of backgrounds and such a disparate set of jobs in the public service? Do you think it's numbers-based or percentage-based?

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: I can't answer that. I think that takes a long quantitative review on what you're doing, but I do think, in a perfect world, if that MPRR were translated into a resumé, and somebody sat there and told the public service manager that this course is your values and ethics course, that would go a long way—

● (1725)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Yes.

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: —because right now that list.... I don't know if any of you have ever seen what an MPRR looks like. It's a one-pager, and it has your whole life on it: your name, rank, date of birth, everybody in your family, all your awards, all your tours and all your courses, by dates and in very brief detail. They translate into some of our public service courses, but a regular manager would never know that.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: No, and it shouldn't be that difficult to have someone from the military say, “This is valid to this and this is acceptable for this qualification.”

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: It's a boots-on-the-ground approach. It's not in a boardroom somewhere saying this is how it works. It's the hiring manager who needs to know how to translate that MPRR.

Ms. Katherine Lamy: If I could add to that, I was asked earlier about the position I applied for. As I said, I applied through the government website, and I received an email saying, “Thank you for applying, but you don't meet the qualifications.”

I never got debriefed. I don't know what I was missing. I think debriefing would be good.

Let's say I'm not selected for an interview. That's water off a duck's back, but at least debrief me to say what criteria I was missing, to help me for the next time.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm glad you brought that up because I do have a concern that perhaps the hiring managers are choosing this person because they want to choose this person—

Ms. Katherine Lamy: Yes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: —and excluding some from the priority, whether it's a medically released vet, a regular vet or one of our other equity targets, for a specific reason.

The Chair: We will have to leave it at that for now.

Colleagues, just to let you know, the bells are going to start ringing at 5:30 p.m. We certainly have enough time for another five-minute intervention.

Mr. Blaikie came in here a little late through no fault of his own. If we have unanimous consent, we could extend it after the bells start ringing for a final three-minute intervention by Mr. Blaikie.

Thank you very much.

Madam Yip, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Jean Yip: How are veterans informed of their priority entitlement?

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: It's part of the release message. When you get out, your case manager sits down and your Veterans Affairs case manager reminds you that, by the way, you have priority entitlement. Then you get a letter in the mail, and you get one in your VAC inbox online, if you remember your password or banking information to get in. It says the exact same thing: This is what priority means; this is how long you have to activate it; this is what it does.

What it doesn't tell you is that, if you see a job online today, it takes you four to five months to activate it, so that job that closes in two weeks is out of your reach.

Ms. Jean Yip: Is there nobody to talk to? Is there no support?

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: You can call, and they will explain it, but again, you have to remember.... My husband, for example, was walked through his entire career: "Here's your travel claim; here's your release information; here's your credit card; here's your passport," because they hold onto that for them. Everything was done for him. The basics of life have been taken care of by the Canadian Forces.

Ms. Jean Yip: I'm sharing my time with Madam Mendès.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Thank you very much.

I love the idea that you suggest about having a public servant in bases actually walking members through the process. I think that's one recommendation we should take very seriously because it makes sense. We don't have hundreds of thousands of bases throughout Canada. I don't know how many we have in all—say 100, if that many. It would make sense, if that's our objective to actually facilitate the transition between military and civilian life. If that's exactly what we want to do to help our veterans succeed in their transition, that's an investment we should make with gladness and commitment.

It makes sense. It's the best link you could make between knowledge of the civil service and knowledge of the military and trying to marry the two.

I don't know if there's any way you would have to articulate it in a very point-by-point or itemized way, or if it's just a general idea that we can, perhaps with the analysts, try to develop, but I do think it's a wonderful idea. It's perhaps one of the best recommendations we can take from this in terms of helping you military people transition into civilian life, beyond the fact that we also need to take into account those who have had service injuries, both physical and mental, who need a lot of help to transition. That's not just filling out the resumé or the application, but it's actually being healthy enough to transition out of DND. That's another big challenge.

It's more a comment than necessarily a question, but I love that suggestion of having the public servant at the bases helping you transition into civilian life.

● (1730)

Ms. Katherine Lamy: Military members are so well trained. They risk their lives to protect all of you. They have done so much for their country. They don't ask for much. They don't ask for a pat on the back. But if there were something you could do to help vets, if we could get a liaison officer on each base to help members complete their paperwork to get into the queue for those positions, it would be a huge plus for them.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have been granted unanimous consent to go an additional three minutes, so Mr. Blaikie can get his final intervention in. We will adjourn after that.

Mr. Blaikie, you have three minutes.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses, both for your service overall and for being here today. Thank you for some very frank and honest advice about what might make things better for people coming out of the service.

My question comes back to the MPRR.

I'm wondering if you could tell me, based on your knowledge of the public service, if there's a comparable list of courses or qualifications there. Would it be possible for veterans coming out of the Canadian Armed Forces who say they have an interest in applying to public service jobs—presumably not everybody has an interest in working for the public service when they come out of the military—to take that document and...? Is there any kind of public service equivalent that you could translate that into that would stand in for many job applications, as opposed to the work that goes into getting every hiring manager to understand the military language? Is it possible to have a document that would satisfy hiring managers without that knowledge that could be used for multiple applications?

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: In my mind, the Canada School of Public Service is the place to go with that. For example, A230, the security awareness course that we all have to do to open our email, exists in the military, but when a military member transitions, the military one isn't recognized. That's one, right off the list.

I'm pretty sure if the public service school took a look at the courses.... The military's great at standards. Get them to sit down with the standards group, look at the courses they take, and say, "You know what? We can PLAR that one—prior learning assessment. Tick."

The public service school has that, and the military have the standards group, that cell. They could provide all the curricula for them to look at.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: That kind of mapping could be possible and would be of value to you.

Ms. Danielle Boutilier: In my mind, absolutely.

Ms. Katherine Lamy: When she was saying that, I thought about security clearances. For example, I had a level II, which is secret. I had that for most of my military career. As soon as I released, it was gone. If I were to apply for a public service job that required that level, I'd have to go through the whole process again. I'm not sure if there's a way to maintain a security clearance for a period of time to facilitate people going into the public service, but that would save a lot of money, even for the government—through the manning, the time spent if you have to contact CSIS, the RCMP and whatnot.

If there's a way to do it, maintain a security clearance for those who vocalize that they intend to go into the public service.

The Chair: I want to thank both of you so much. Your presence here has been not just welcomed, it has been incredibly informative and helpful.

As I mentioned to our first set of panellists, should you have additional information you think would be of benefit to this committee as we continue with our study, perhaps looking at recommendations that some of you have already identified, please send that information to our clerk. It will help form our final report.

Once again, thank you not only for your appearance here, but for your service to your country.

Colleagues, the meeting is adjourned.