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• (1545)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): Ladies and gentlemen, let's call this meeting to order. This is the 16th meeting of the national defence committee.

We are continuing our study on recruitment and retention, and we are joined by our two witnesses: Professor Christian Leuprecht, and June Winger, national president of the Union of National Defence Employees.

Before I call on Professor Leuprecht for his five-minute opening statement, ladies and gentlemen, we continue to run the clock here. We're 16 minutes late in starting. I propose to shave a minute off everybody's time on the first round, and a minute off everybody in the second round. Hopefully, that will get us somewhere close to the hour that we have allocated. Unless I see wild and crazy objections, that's what we're going to do.

With that, Professor Leuprecht, you have five minutes, please.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht (Professor, Royal Military College, Queen's University, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

I will speak in English, but I will answer questions in both official languages.

Thank you for the invitation.

[English]

Last week, I was called before government operations on the topic of procurement. Today, I have been asked to share my expertise on recruitment and retention in the Canadian Armed Forces and across the defence team. Last week's subjects and this week's testimonies are related.

It can take up to 15 years to envision, initiate, procure and implement a new system, such as the next-generation air force fighter program. Less apparent is that it takes just as long to generate the experienced workforce to operate these complex systems. For years, the CAF has had to privilege operations. Now people need to be reconstituted, but the people and equipment systems are out of sync for regenerating and maintaining the force and aligning that with equipment modernization.

The CAF now suffers from a sizable experience gap, especially at the level of junior NCMs and officers. This "missing middle" is the centre of gravity for the CAF. This middle force does the work of recruiting, instructing, absorbing in units and supervision in

units. In terms of readiness, this presents a significant risk of failure at a time of growing demand on the CAF and growing complexity of missions.

For years, the CAF has been sufficiently robust or the nature of conflict has been such that the government could choose the force packages that worked for the CAF. Meanwhile, baseline foundational capabilities have been eroded, but in the new security environment, government no longer has the luxury of choosing baseline or tailor-made packages. This shortfall bears considerable reputational risk, as admonishments of Canada by both the Secretary General of NATO and the Biden administration suggest.

The "missing middle" is not only the members who train the force and operate equipment. They are the ones the government calls on as a last resort, whether to manage national vaccine distribution or mitigate the fallout from mismanaged long-term care facilities during the pandemic. Ergo, people are the CAF's most important and underappreciated capability and should be treated as such.

Talent has to be recruited, trained and retained. To this effect, the first two pillars of the new CAF journey are not just the most pressing for the organization, but, aptly, they are also the subject of national defence's current study on renewing personnel generation and modernizing the employment model.

As of February 22, the CAF is 7,600 members short of its authorized strength. Due to imbalances in the training system, it is actually 10,000 people short in the operational force. The CAF is currently operating at only about 85% operational force size on current mandates and roles. The organization is especially short on master corporals [Technical difficulty—Editor]. This experience gap is having and will have cascading effects for years to come.

As a result, stabilization and recovery of military personnel are a top priority. Generate bespoke personnel for one hundred endangered occupational functions and leadership positions, especially to meet requirements of the navy as well as across the cyber, space and information domains. Reduce early service attrition, as well as differentiated unhealthy attrition at the end of initial engagements, which is after a member's first or second term of service, due to discrimination, harassment, misconduct or sexual misconduct. Set conditions to develop and build future force capability.

To this effect, I offer the following observations for MPs as stakeholders in what General Brodie calls the modern mobilization mindset and in the movement to regenerate the CAF and ensure the operational readiness of a vital and venerable national institution and instrument of foreign policy and national power.

First, expand the CAF and public service talent pool. This isn't mass recruitment. It's about a targeted approach to interest the right people in the right occupations. Recruiting is a whole-of-government and a whole-of-nation effort. Every riding and every member of Parliament has a key role to play in building trust in the credibility of the CAF and raising awareness of the CAF as an employer of choice, especially among women, diverse ethno-cultural groups, immigrant communities and indigenous peoples.

Second, make the defence team more agile by reducing and streamlining HR processes and policies. There are hundreds of them. Onerous processes are partially responsible for the prevailing staff shortages across the defence team.

- (1550)

Without more money and more staff, modernizing the rules and processes to make recruitment and retention more feasible and more affordable and putting in place the ministerial authorities to execute are existential to reconstitute the CAF, in particular stabilization and recovery of personnel capability. To this end, the CAF needs to modernize hundreds of policies related to recruitment and retention that are out of date. That requires priority attention by central agencies.

The Standing Committee on National Defence must ensure that Treasury Board, and in particular its president, make policy renewal for DND and the CAF a top priority. Bureaucratic or political delays will further imperil the ability of the CAF to operate.

Number three, MPs can enhance pillar three of the CAF journey, which is to support military families, by ensuring they are actively invested in minimizing stressors on CAF families through effective and efficient intergovernmental co-operation, coordination and collaboration among federal, provincial, territorial and local authorities in areas such as access to health care, education and child care.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Winger, go ahead.

Ms. June Winger (National President, Union of National Defence Employees): Thank you for the opportunity to appear today.

The Union of National Defence Employees of the Public Service Alliance of Canada represents 20,000 civilian defence workers. Our members ensure that military operations are mission-ready at all times and that military members have safe and secure places to live and work. Our members are experts who work on bases and in offices, warehouses, airports, labs and garages. They provide consistent and knowledgeable services so that the military can be agile and combat-ready.

Privatization, contracting out, sexual misconduct, harassment and discrimination undermine our members' work and occupational satisfaction.

Our 2020 report highlighted the dangers of contracting out cleaning services. It showed that budget allocation restraints force base commanders to regularly contract out essential work, costing more and providing poorer service. For example, this is a quote from a DND briefing note in Kingston:

It was observed that in an effort to increase the profit margin the contract cleaners were using inferior or improper cleaning products which resulted in additional maintenance, environmental problems and health and safety issues resulting in unfit living conditions.

The statement of work for the contract with Dexterra at Kingston has a total value of just over \$3 million over six years. That's less than half of what's necessary to pay the workers even a minimum wage. It's a clear indication that the service will be compromised.

Our report also detailed the situation of a contracted minimum-wage worker who cleaned a DND medical centre. During most of her employment, she didn't have the necessary WHMIS training and didn't understand how the chemicals she used could hurt herself or others. She was instructed to water down cleaning solutions and forced to clean secure areas without having the proper security clearance. It wasn't her fault, but her work compromised the patients and other workers. She eventually quit for better work, pay and benefits offered at a fast-food outlet.

DND must stop contracting out and must repatriate existing contracted-out services. There must be transparent and comprehensive reasons if contracting out must be used on rare occasions.

Harassment within DND is systemic and entrenched, and it's not limited to members of the military.

One of our members, Kristina MacLean, experienced constant sexual and racial harassment, and she filed numerous grievances and complaints. She won. As a result, she was forced to endure even more harassment. According to MacLean, “Managers are afraid to acknowledge anything out of line because they fear not getting promoted. They make problems go away.” And they tried to make her go away.

The culture in fire halls is another example of toxicity.

CFB Valcartier firefighters filed nine violence in the workplace complaints, eight of which were founded. Firefighters at CFB Suffield have accused the deputy fire chief of violent behaviour while the fire chief stood idly by. Complaints dating back to 2019 have yet to be resolved.

Our union is working with the investigation into sexual misconduct and workplace harassment conducted by former Supreme Court Justice Louise Arbour. We commend Minister Anand for her apology, and we support her acceptance of Madame Arbour's initial recommendation that all such incidents be investigated and prosecuted in the civilian justice system.

Now DND needs to expedite the current active investigations. It needs to enforce harassment policies and ensure that those committing abuses face consequences, and it must include civilian workers in all aspects of any review of the current systems.

When it comes to occupational satisfaction, wage gaps are a major issue. DND's operational workers are paid less than their equivalent trades in the private sector.

DND firefighters, for example, are paid approximately 20% less than their equivalent municipal firefighters are, yet DND firefighters are responsible for a much wider range of safety and security duties, more than what is normal for a first-class municipal firefighter. Also, they're not eligible for the early retirement that's available to nearly every other firefighter in every other jurisdiction.

• (1555)

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair: Ms. Findlay, you have five minutes.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to the witnesses, thank you for being here.

Professor Leuprecht, you talked about expanding the CAF talent pool and getting the right people in the right positions. Do you think universality of service should still be a criterion if you're talking about specialized positions in IT, for instance?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: In the kinetic domain, universality of service will remain, I think, indispensable because you will run into morale issues if some people get deployed and others don't.

But there are, for instance.... You mentioned IT. IT is a particular challenge because we now have a cybertrade on the uniform side, but we don't have an equivalent cybertrade on the civilian side. The department is engaged in workarounds, but we need that civilian trade because it's a way of bringing in people with these qualifications who don't necessarily want to be in uniform.

There are certain tasks only people in uniform can do, but one way to compensate for some of the shortfalls is to have greater agility in creating equivalent trades on the civilian side, and then also providing more lateral movement so people can move from other departments into those trades and out again, as well as from the private sector into the department and out again.

Those are areas where we're simply not particularly agile.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Thank you.

What do you think draws people to the Canadian Forces as recruits?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I'm sorry. I didn't hear the first part.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: What do you think draws people to the Canadian Forces as recruits? What attracts them to sign up?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I think the Canadian Armed Forces is an employer of choice and the numbers would suggest that. In any given year, there are about 35,000 to 65,000 people who come through the door, and about 5,000 of those end up getting hired.

I would say that the organization has good standing with the public and there's a broad range of reasons why people will join. The key is to ensure that, in particular for members from under-represented groups, the organization is broadly representative of the society that it serves.

We know the Canadian Armed Forces has made inroads in particular with visible minority groups, as well as with indigenous people, but if you look at the most recent analytics, there are very significant challenges in the attractiveness of the organization to women.

• (1600)

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: During the Afghan war, we seemed to have great success in recruiting young Canadians. What do you think motivated that?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I think the Canadian Armed Forces is a foreign policy tool, possibly the government's most important foreign policy tool. I'm not sure that's widely understood by Canadians or even on the Hill.

I think what we saw during Afghanistan was attention by the government to the Canadian Armed Forces as an instrument of policy and as an instrument of national power, and we saw a government that stood behind its Canadian Armed Forces and made the Canadian Armed Forces a policy priority.

I think inherently when people look at what employer they are going to join, they want to join an employer that has the backing of the government of the day. I think it is key that defence be a top policy priority at any given time, regardless of the political stripe of the government, in the Prime Minister's Office and in cabinet. I'm not sure that's reflected to Canadians, at times, in government policy.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: What more do you think could be done by the CAF and National Defence to attract women, aboriginals, LGBTQ+ members and people from ethnic minorities? What can they do to reach out better?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: We need a very targeted recruitment and relationship-building mechanism. We have a challenge in that the forces aren't really present in those areas where there's the greatest demographic growth and the greatest representation, both in general of the Canadian Armed Forces recruit pool as well as of those under-represented groups. It's in part because we don't have bases in most major urban areas in Canada.

We need to have a much more targeted approach, and a much more systematic and long-standing relationship-building approach. The reserves play an important role in familiarizing Canadians, and that recruit pool in particular, with the organization and the prospects that the organization offers. I think most Canadians have complete unfamiliarity with working for the federal government, let alone working for the Canadian Armed Forces, because if you live in Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal, it's highly improbable you have ever met anyone who works for the federal government, let alone anyone who wears the uniform.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Findlay.

Mr. Fisher, you have five minutes.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank both of our witnesses for being here and for their expert testimony.

Professor, I'm really pleased that you're back on this study, because you added a great deal to the last study we just finished up.

I want to touch on universality of service. I know that my colleague Ms. Findlay touched on it as well. You used the term "modernize", to modernize the model. I'm just going to read here from the "Defence Administrative Orders and Directives". I think modernizing the model is one of the ways out of this recruiting issue we have.

The principle of the universality of service...holds that CAF members are liable to perform general military duties and common defence and security duties, not just the duties of their military occupation or occupational specification. This may include, but is not limited to, the requirement to be physically fit, employable and deployable for general operational duties.

What challenges does this create for recruitment and retention, Professor?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: One of the problems the organization had is that it didn't even know exactly what its shortfalls were or how to remedy them. It now has the analytics capability to know exactly where its people are and what is required.

These are very distinct challenges, the recruitment challenge and the retention challenge. You'll see in the new CAF journey that these are pillars one and two, and they're pillars one and two for a good reason: The entire rest of the organization hinges on them, and they are the component that is currently at the single greatest risk.

I would say the greatest challenge has been that, for 20 years, government has focused on operations and pushing out the Canadian Armed Forces on operations without putting.... The organization is too small to be able to do major operations, major maintenance and sustainment, and major regeneration at the same time, so government has had to focus on operations, operations, operations. It

has not invested in regeneration, and it has not invested in or paid attention to maintenance and sustainment.

I would plead with you as a committee that that's where the eyes need to be on the ball, because there is now such a critical shortage, as I laid out for you, of some key personnel that you are now genuinely endangering the ability of this organization to respond to the requests of government when called upon in critical and complex operations.

• (1605)

Mr. Darren Fisher: Professor, during your opening remarks, I wanted to ask you about resistance to change. Our society has a resistance to change. You used the term "morale issues". Were you speaking to the fact that, if we were to remove stipulation on physical fitness or different aspects of universality of service...? Talk about that a little bit, about how that resistance to change is a real thing and how that might impact recruitment and retention as well.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: The military likes to say that soldiers aren't born; they're made. I think, in many ways, this also applies to the modern Canadian Armed Forces. It might apply more so because the organization needs to train, generate the *formation*, as they say in French, the individuals they need. That takes a long time. To fully train an officer can take up to seven years, and sometimes longer, depending on the particular trade. They need that experience.

I think what people often don't understand is that you can sort of impoverish the organization, but you need the people who have kinetic experience and deployment experience abroad, for instance, to be able to surge on very short capacity to deliver on vaccines, on long-term care homes or whatever the government might ask the Canadian Armed Forces to do.

I think the capacity exists within the organization to take individuals who want to be part of the organization but, for instance, don't have the fitness, the math scores or whatever it might be. The problem is that it hasn't been able to focus enough attention and resources on those individuals because it has had to draw everybody it possibly can to the operational side.

It's all doable, but it's a matter of how you allocate the extremely scarce resources that exist within the organization, especially on the human side, that junior officer side, which does so much of the heavy lifting both on the operation side as well as on the instruction and training side.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Normandin, go ahead for five minutes.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for joining us. We are always very happy about that.

I will first turn to Professor Leuprecht.

I will stay on the topic of universality. In the future, we will probably increasingly need to use the forces' services to respond to climate emergencies; that is what we have seen in the past. Of course, there has been COVID-19, but there have also been fires and floods, among others.

Would it be relevant, at the very least, to consider the idea of setting up a paramilitary organization or some form of militia that would be used specifically for those kinds of responses? It could even interest some people, who don't want to participate in combat, for instance, which could be a positive thing for recruitment.

Do you think this possibility should be explored?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: That is an excellent question, Ms. Normandin.

I will send to the committee my study on this issue.

There are three options when it comes to this.

First, there is the American option. We could create an organization like the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, which is a large bureaucracy that costs a lot of money and moves very slowly. I assume that is appropriate for the United States, but there are good reasons why other allies have not adopted that system.

Second, we could have organizations that respond to emergencies. For example, Australia and many European countries have emergency response services. In the medium term, we could set up that kind of an organization in Canada, but, over the short term, that infrastructure does not exist. For years, I have been insisting that this type of infrastructure is necessary.

Currently, when we use the Canadian Armed Forces for domestic deployments, resources are available; we have that luxury. However, if a widespread international crisis occurred and we needed forces to protect our allies, our country and the continent, those kinds of resources would no longer be available. So it is necessary for the provinces to create organizations that could provide volunteers and a skilled workforce.

The third option is the one we have adopted, and it consists of an increase in the resources and expertise of the Canadian Red Cross. But that also has its limitations. The Red Cross staff has limited expertise. The Red Cross needs to have a staff with broader expertise to meet your stated requirements.

The fourth option, which I presented in my study, is my preferred one. It consists in creating a unit of about 2,000 people within the Canadian Armed Forces. That unit would be dedicated to domestic deployment and would work on achieving your stated objectives. If we don't need to mobilize that unit for a domestic deployment, it could participate in the development of indigenous communities in the far north. On the one hand, such a unit could improve Canada's response capacity to national requirements; on the other hand, it could be a complement to the development efforts of communities in the far north. The far north needs the staff and resources that only the Canadian Armed Forces have.

• (1610)

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I will read with interest the documents you will be so kind to send to us.

Considering that operational resources are limited, I understand that we have redirected the forces assigned to recruitment toward anything more related to the operational aspect.

As that deprives us of recruits over the long term, was it a mistake?

If so, should the mistake be corrected? Should the forces that have been redirected to the operational aspect be redirected back to recruitment?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I would say, Ms. Normandin, that the forces are now strongly focused on regenerating the Canadian Armed Forces. The effort being invested is tremendous.

The issue is that the staff shortage is leading to other aspects of the Canadian Armed Forces being neglected. We always have to focus on one aspect or another.

With it comes to regeneration, we are at a critical stage. Failure in that area may destroy the organization. One of the definite issues is a shortage of resources and staff, but I would also say that the procedures are very complicated. It takes 200 days on average for a person to be hired by the Canadian Armed Forces.

How can we be competitive? Even if candidates want to apply, we cannot expect them to be unable to pay their rent for 200 days. They will accept another job as soon as they are offered one.

On the one hand, many of those procedures must be updated; on the other hand, governments and central agencies also impose policies on the organization.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're going to have to leave it there, unfortunately, Madame Normandin.

I take note of that study you referenced, Professor Leuprecht. In the event that you have not already submitted it at some previous point in your appearances before this committee, I'm sure we'd appreciate it. Thank you for that.

You have five minutes, Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you so much.

Ms. Winger, you spoke a lot about the outsourcing of work on base and you gave a couple of examples, one about the unfit living conditions because of poor cleaning and one in terms of the medical facility.

Can you provide more examples or expand on how privatization has impacted specifically the health and safety of workers within DND and CAF?

Ms. June Winger: Thank you for the question.

Certainly I can. I can give an example from when the pandemic was first called in. I can tell you that the Department of National Defence worked really hard at making sure that all the employees and military members were safe. We worked really well together. There was a great deal of consultation and we put in all the processes we needed to make sure that safety was the number one priority.

It wasn't the same for those employees who were contractors. I can tell you of contracted employees at a particular base who were being told they still had to continue to come into the workplace. They still had to continue to do different duties that weren't their regular duties because those were no longer required due to the lower manning that was happening as a result of the pandemic. They weren't given any safety gear. These employees, these contractors, were putting their lives at risk, and they were literally putting the employees of National Defence and the military members' lives at risk as well because they were acting almost as a conduit. If one of them were infected with the virus, they would have easily been spreading it at that point.

We had to work very hard with National Defence and with the contractors to try to get that addressed. In most cases, we were successful, but in a couple, we weren't. We're just very lucky that we didn't see any catastrophic results from that.

• (1615)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Of course, that would impact morale among troops and among workers.

Can you talk about how that impacts retention as we're going forward in this study?

Ms. June Winger: Certainly.

That sent a very strong signal to the colleagues. When we're at National Defence, we do have a family feeling. We do feel that we have a tight-knit group as we work with each other. Whether we are contractor [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] or military members, we are all on the same team and working together.

It was very obvious when we were seeing that one group was treated so very poorly as opposed to the others. That was hard on everybody, not just the contractors. It was hard on those employees because people didn't want to get into a position where they would be calling out the contractors and telling them that they shouldn't be there. They didn't want to be putting in complaints, but their failure to do so was risking their own health.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: In terms of outsourcing and that privatization side, that has increased quite significantly. Can you explain specifically why? I think you touched on it terms of the changes in budgets and how bases are run, but could you explain that a bit more?

Ms. June Winger: We have our salary wage envelopes at National Defence. That is money the department is given just to maintain their public servants. However, they also have money through the operations and maintenance budget, and they often have more money in there. It's easy for them, then, to just contract out work where they have this other pile of money, rather than going after increasing the suite to an appropriate level for what they need. Then you end up in situations—just like the previous speaker was commenting on—where you have these massive shortfalls at the work-

place and you become very reliant on contractors to pick up the work that needs to be done.

That doesn't always work. In fact, that rarely ever works. It certainly is not the most cost-effective way of doing it. We usually end up having to pay more money, and we're not getting the services we need and certainly not when we need them.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Ms. Mathysen, if I may, I'm currently on a hiring committee for professors at RMC. At a civilian university, this takes three months. At RMC, it takes us 18 months, from flash to bang, to hire a new professor—six times as long. I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you. It's flash-bang hiring.

Mr. Motz, you have four minutes for the second round.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

“Flash-bang” was the term we used with the tactical team, and I don't want to go back to those sounds and sights.

Professor Leuprecht, you mentioned something in your opening remarks. You called it the “missing middle”. You explained that we need to fix it quickly. How do we fix it quickly? Can you expand on the danger that the missing middle poses to our military's readiness to protect our country?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: This is your junior leadership and management cadre that ultimately needs to bring your organization along. That's the cadre you're relying on to make operations happen and do a lot of that sustainment and maintenance. It's heavily engaged in the regeneration component of the force. Because of the shortages, there's all the more pressure and tax on those individuals who stay. You can see how this becomes a particular challenge, because in addition to all the other challenges that come with serving in the CAF family and so forth, you now have exceptional pressure on that missing middle.

How do you protect that missing middle? How do you move those individuals along? How do you make sure that, as we come back behind, we have a systematic strategy to backfill for that missing middle? We got ourselves there precisely because we didn't have the resources, the time and the capabilities to focus on regeneration. We used that missing middle to focus disproportionately on making sure we deliver on Government of Canada operations. That works for a short period of time, but after a while you wear out the organization to where we are now.

As a result of the pandemic... You don't have recruitment shortfalls per se. What you have is training shortfalls, because the organization in 2021 was only able to bring in about half the people it normally would—not for lack of interest, but for lack of capacity to actually get these people through recruitment and through the training system. The pandemic has added to the challenges.

• (1620)

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you for that, Professor.

I certainly agree with the need to reconsider and rethink how we deploy our Canadian Forces personnel. When I talk to young people in my riding and people who are interested in the military, the last thing they find attractive in the Canadian military is the need to overfocus on the domestic emergencies that the armed forces are currently looking at. I did appreciate some of your thoughts.

If you were in charge, Professor, what's the most important thing, the one thing you would consider recommending to this committee that would be impactful in increasing recruitment and retention? Where would you go with that?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Luckily, Mr. Motz, I'm a prof, so nobody will ever put me in charge of anything. That's the [*Inaudible—Editor*] thing about the organization.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: You're an honest man.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Look, I have all the admiration in the world for the many people who are really trying to make this work, but I do think it takes far too long to get people into our system, and it takes too long to get people through the training system. This is where Ms. Winger's comments are really important, because what we forget is that if you want to train people, you need facilities that are appropriate for that. Many of these facilities.... Look at DND and the hundreds of buildings and thousands of kilometres of roads, or the 50-year-old culverts in Gagetown that were washed out in 2015 or 2016—I have it in my testimony from last week—which basically imperiled training operations in Gagetown for over a year.

You need those cooks. You need exactly the people who are part of Ms. Winger's organization. You need the bus drivers to ferry people from their dorms to the training operations. That's where we're having critical shortages of people within the training system.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Motz.

Ms. Lambropoulos, you have four minutes, please.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to both of our witnesses for being here to answer some of our questions today.

Mr. Leuprecht, you mentioned that a lot of the recruitment and retention policies put in place are very out of date. I was wondering if you could be a bit more specific as to which ones need to go and whether or not you know of any systems outside of Canada with good recruitment and retention that we should maybe look to during this study.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I would say it's less about which policies per se need to go, but the ability to actually.... If you're putting people in the training system, it means that those people aren't there to modernize your policies. Part of this is a staffing issue; there are only so many people to go around to do this. I'm happy to provide some more details to the committee afterwards.

There are literally hundreds of policies that need to be updated, not because the organization doesn't want to update them, but because it doesn't have the staff to do that. However, when you update them, it takes months or years to percolate through the system, the central agencies.

This is why I was saying that one thing this committee needs to urge Treasury Board to do, and the President of the Treasury Board,

is that when a DND policy submission comes to them, it must receive priority treatment. It can't take weeks or months to percolate through the system, because that further imperils the system.

Different countries have different employment conditions, so I think it's not that easy to compare to other countries. You might look, for instance, at a country such as Sweden, which has recently scaled up pretty substantially on reconstituting its force. That was already before the Russian revisionism in Ukraine.

I think we need to look at countries that have similar values and similar objectives to our own. For instance, the Netherlands is a country that frequently gets lost in the shuffle and conversation. I think if you also look at Australia—a country that has consistently spent 2%—it's about two-thirds of our population and two-thirds of our economy. However, because of the security environment that Australia has to live in, with half of the world's population within 500 miles of its coast, it has paid much closer attention to these issues.

• (1625)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Can you also comment a little [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] whether you believe that PRs should be given a little more flexibility? Under certain conditions, they're able to apply for the armed forces, but generally speaking, it's reserved for Canadian citizens.

Do you think that if Canada were to open it a bit more and allow more PRs to join, we would have less of an issue, a little bit more interest, or at least a better time attracting more people?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: There are certainly countries that use permanent residency conditions as an expedited mechanism to obtain citizenship. I think as long as that doesn't compromise our ability to obtain proper security clearances and to do proper resilience assessments on the individuals who join, I would certainly favour a system where people who demonstrate their loyalty to this country through service to the Canadian Armed Forces have an expedited route to Canadian citizenship.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I'm not sure how much time I have left, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Your cat has 19 seconds, but you're out of time.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much, Mr. Leuprecht.

The Chair: Madame Normandin, you have a minute, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

This time, my question is for Ms. Winger.

A witness said this week that people who leave the armed forces are often given priority for positions in paramilitary and public sector organizations. Yet they sometimes bring with them the toxic culture we are currently seeing within the armed forces.

I would first like to know whether you have noted the same phenomenon.

I would also like to know whether the fight against toxic environments within the armed forces will potentially also have a positive effect on the defence sector, paramilitary organizations and the public service?

[English]

Ms. June Winger: That's a very interesting question that you raised, and it's a very complex situation, obviously.

It's nearly impossible to train out a toxic work environment. You can't put people who have these behaviours and these ideas and give them training [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] see the light and change their ways. These are typically embedded characteristics of people.

When whatever happens that causes them to leave the military, if they have these characteristics, they often end up getting preference for public service positions. National Defence is a big supporter of hiring ex-military members, and so they should be. The challenge is that those who have those ideologies are then coming in, and it's almost as though they're in a hidden uniform. They're showing up and they still have these beliefs. They're coming into an environment where they are quite comfortable, where they're familiar with things and they have the support of current serving military members. You see that they tend to support one another when they're at the workplace.

Of course, there's a hierarchy within that, but—

The Chair: Ms. Winger, we're going to have to leave the question there, only because it's a very complicated question, as you rightly said. You can possibly work it into the response to another question.

Ms. Mathysen, you have a minute, please.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Ms. Winger, I wanted to ask how the privatization you were talking about before—the contracting out—impacts the transparency and national security of the work that your members do?

• (1630)

Ms. June Winger: Again, that's a very difficult question.

How does it impact the security of the work? There are a great deal of challenges. We are reliant on our contractors to be following the rules, but the contractors don't have the same goals as the National Defence employees. National Defence employees want to make National Defence work. They want the operation to be successful. They want to serve Canadians. Contractors want to make money. That's what their goal is. They want to create profit sharing for their shareholders. They want to increase revenue for the owners. That is what their goal is.

When you have these two compromising goals, it doesn't necessarily work. You end up with corners getting cut. I used the example at a DND medical centre. You have employees who are cutting the chemicals, so you don't have the appropriate cleansers in there. You don't have the knowledge going into the training that happens with it. We see that time and again. I would say—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Winger. I seem to have the task of interrupting you. It's because my colleagues ask complicated questions and ask you to answer them in 30 seconds. It's all their fault.

Mr. Schmale, you have four minutes.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

I appreciate the testimony today by the witnesses.

I'm not a regular member of the committee, so I apologize if some of these questions have been asked before.

My first question is for the professor. Are you aware of any impacts that the mandatory vaccination policy has had on recruitment and retention within the Canadian Armed Forces?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: To the best that I'm aware, with the numbers that are available—you'd need to check with the military personnel generation group—the policy has not had an impact on recruitment. It appears that interest propensity is as it was before. The impact it had on attrition was relatively minor in the grand scheme of things. It was manageable for the organization.

I think this is really a question about needing an organization that is resilient. If you have large components of the organization not being operable, then you can't perform for Canadians. I think that's really what the vaccination issue is about.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you very much, Professor.

I'm switching gears a bit here. In your view, could positive change in the military culture happen without erasing the military or naval or even warrior ethos?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I think you're already seeing significant changes. You'll soon see the new profession of arms manual being released, "CAF Ethos: Trusted to Serve". You'll see the Canadian Armed Forces journey, which is the new health and wellness strategy.

I think the vast majority of women, men and diverse members of the Canadian Armed Forces are dedicated to cultural change and to sustaining that cultural change. It is a matter of making sure we have policies that can be operationalized and realized, and that are developed in consultation with stakeholders and experts, rather than just from the top down.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you, Professor.

Not too long ago, according to these numbers that I have in front of me, 20% or more of the Canadian Forces regular force used to be recruited from Atlantic Canada. Is that number still relatively the same? Is it around 20% of members in the CAF?

I'll let you answer that first, before I go to my second question.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I'd be able to obtain those numbers for you. I don't have those numbers with me. The military personnel generation group has those numbers.

Of course, systematically, that's a challenge for the organization, because there's a significant demographic decline in Atlantic Canada and demographic challenges also within Quebec. These pose a whole separate conversation in terms of challenges around sustaining bilingualism within the federal government and the Canadian Armed Forces.

• (1635)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Perfect.

Professor, you talked about this a bit earlier in your comments, as well as in your opening statement. Can you maybe expand on one change or recommendation, or maybe the most important one, that you have for this committee that would be impactful in increasing recruitment?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Understand what the requirements are to be able to deliver for the government's expectations. I believe we don't currently have the right balance between accountability and transparency processes, on the one hand, and politicians who keep saying that they will deliver for the military, that they will deliver the people, that they will deliver the kit. I don't think we can have politicians making those promises when they know full well that the processes and the bureaucracies simply aren't aligned to deliver that.

I'll give you the example of sonar operators. We're building all these fantastically expensive ships. Well, if we don't actually have the expertise to staff those ships, those will be sitting around in dock. With the F-35s, we have a significant challenge around pilots. I think these are all very attractive occupations. The problem is that most Canadians have never even heard of them. They don't know what a sonar operator is, let alone what this individual might do and how they're critical to the operation of a ship.

I think that's where we all have significant roles to play in socializing Canadians and familiarizing them with the Canadian Armed Forces as an employer of choice.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Schmale.

Welcome to the committee, by the way.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Spengemann, you have the final four minutes.

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Professor Leuprecht, it's good to see you again. Thank you for being with us.

At the outset, I want to ask you about your appointment, I think a fairly new appointment, to the board of the German Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies. I want to take advantage of your presence and ask you if there's anything we can borrow from the German experience—good, bad or ugly. Sometimes having the same problems appear in a different jurisdiction sort of underscores how important they are here, but there potentially are also positive things, and maybe even very recent things with respect to the war in Ukraine.

Is there any light that the German experience with respect to the talent pool, as you say, but also the HR processes could shed on our scenario?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Well, certainly on the equipment side, one of my German friends likes to say that the Germans have boats that don't float, planes that don't fly and tanks that don't roll anywhere. I would say that we have some rather similar problems on the equipment side.

Interestingly, we have similar sorts of challenges on the staffing side, but the German staffing organization is much more agile than the Canadian one, in part because much of the German Bundeswehr runs on a defence agency rather than civil service employment model. It runs on different types of contracts. That has meant that even in a society that is very similar to Canada's, with unfamiliarity and perhaps even some hostility towards the military, they have been able to sustain their numbers. But the German military is also facing significant staffing challenges, and I think there's obviously a lot to be done here in terms of comparative work on what is working in comparable jurisdictions.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: That's very interesting. Thank you for that, Professor.

On the HR policy side, one way to slice this would be to say, okay, let's take a look at some private sector and public organizations that do HR extremely well, that have high retention rates, that have excellent recruitment processes and that get the people they want quickly enough. Then, line those up against the HR policies of the Canadian Forces and figure out which obstacles are structurally in the Canadian Forces—by virtue of, as we discussed, universality of service and other military-related policies that cannot be eliminated—and which ones could potentially go.

To your knowledge, has any of that been done? Have any third party management consulting firms been retained to take a look at this, or might this be one pathway to broach some of these questions that you mentioned in your introduction?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Mr. Spengemann, that's a great question, but actually, I'm not sure the Canadian Armed Forces needs more consultants to tell them what problems they have and what challenges they have. They know full well what those challenges are. What they don't currently have is the internal civilian and military staffing to be able to address all of these challenges.

What the Canadian Armed Forces needs, more desperately than consultants, is a 15-year sustained commitment by all parties in this House to regenerating, sustaining and operating this organization. To this effect, I would urge all parties to work together on multi-party votes on key defence decisions and on committing to a joint pathway forward for the Canadian Armed Forces.

It is similar to a private sector organization, in the sense that if you keep changing pathways or if you don't pay attention, as some might argue has been the challenge also for this organization, you're bound to run into trouble. Now that we're in trouble, we really do need sustained attention, because we are genuinely, Mr. Spengemann, embarrassing ourselves with our allies.

• (1640)

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Understood.

Let me take the 30 seconds I have to ask you this then: Is there a white paper or a policy paper that zooms in on the very specific HR questions you've mentioned? Are there marching orders? I don't think it's clear to the committee necessarily that those marching orders exist, in a figurative sense, and that the armed forces could work on them to change these HR policies. Is that available? If so, could you provide that to the committee?

The Chair: Be very brief in your answer, please.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I can provide some material to the committee. I would encourage you to engage Brigadier-General Brodie, Major-General Bernard, as well as the military personnel generation hierarchy, because those are the people who are ultimately responsible for the entire HR system. I think those people are doing yeoman's work here and could certainly benefit from the sort of attention you are heaping on these policies, because they're ultimately in charge of making these components work for the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Spengemann.

That ends our first hour.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank Dr. Leuprecht and Ms. Winger for their contribution to this study with, as always, their excellent observations.

I'll reiterate the point you raised, Dr. Leuprecht, about the study you referenced during Ms. Normandin's question. If that could be made available, that would be appreciated.

With that, we're going to suspend and bring in the witnesses to assemble our next panel.

Thank you again.

• (1640) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1640)

The Chair: We'll bring this meeting back to order.

For our second panel, we have Gregory Lick, National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces ombudsman, and Robyn Hynes, director general, operations. Welcome.

I'll ask you for your five-minute opening statements.

I'll start with you, Mr. Lick.

• (1645)

Mr. Gregory Lick (Ombudsman, National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon. I want to thank the committee for inviting me here today to discuss recruitment and retention in the Canadian Armed Forces. I am joined, as you said, by Robyn Hynes, my director general of operations, and we are pleased to be with you over the next hour to provide you some sense of those issues, based on the evidence we have found.

While this is my first appearance before this committee in the 44th Parliament, I have already had the pleasure of meeting many

members of this committee in person one-on-one, and I look forward to meeting the remaining members in the near future.

As you have likely already heard, the issues surrounding recruitment and retention have many factors affecting them.

[*Translation*]

From a recruitment perspective, there are a number of reasons why individuals choose or choose not to join the Canadian Armed Forces. There are also a number of reasons why the Canadian Armed Forces cannot connect with and recruit certain Canadians into their ranks.

Additionally, aside from medical release or release for disciplinary purposes, an individual member of the Canadian Armed Forces may leave the forces for a number of reasons. But when you group these reasons together, patterns begin to emerge, and issues of a systemic nature begin to reveal themselves. Over the last 23 years of this office's existence, we have followed these issues closely, and have made recommendations to the Canadian Armed Forces on how they can address these issues moving forward.

[*English*]

I want to take this time to discuss some of the themes that we are currently examining and plan to examine in the near future that directly affect recruitment and retention.

Last June, I held a press conference addressing the ongoing issues surrounding misconduct in the military and the department. During that press conference, I stated that the Canadian Forces grievance system is broken. I will hold that position until I see that there is a long-term solution to what are clearly some deep issues that revive the long delays every time after a quick fix to address the backlog.

As I have told many of you, our office is in a unique position to make this determination. We are sometimes called an office of last resort. This means that we typically refer people back into the grievance system until those mechanisms have been exhausted, or unless there are compelling circumstances. What I can say firmly is that we are intervening in more cases earlier in the grievance process, and this is a troubling trend.

The grievance system is the principal recourse mechanism that a Canadian Armed Forces member has to address unfairness or seek a resolution to a variety of situations. However, members can face significant delays in the grievance process. For some, these delays can lead to financial hardship, physical and emotional stress, relationship breakdown and worse. Recently, I have had to involve myself in two grievance files, one that was over nine years, and another over four years. My office has since received a response to our query related to all grievances that are delayed, broken down by grievance type and length of delay. This response provides a clear picture of the number problem, but it does not reveal the reality of why this is occurring.

As I stated to the chief of the defence staff in two letters sent in late 2021, I strongly believe that the fix to the grievance system is both people and process. Unfortunately, many of the fixes we have seen thrown at the system over the decades have only provided a surge capacity of people to bring down the backlog.

The underlying problems in the grievance system are daunting, but failure to act on them in a meaningful way will only continue to erode trust in the system. Like many before them, many more CAF members with promising careers ahead of them will walk out the door as a result of inaction. It is discouraging that some of the issues we continue to identify with the chain of command were raised by the first ombudsman between 1998 and 2005. The cycle continues.

[*Translation*]

Simple fixes, such as addressing the fact that the chief of the defence staff has very limited financial authority to address an unfairness for a CAF member, makes absolutely no sense.

From a retention perspective, any prospective member of the Canadian Armed Forces should know that, if they face an issue during their time in uniform, there is a system in place that works. Currently, that cannot be guaranteed, and this will have an impact on keeping people in the armed forces.

• (1650)

[*English*]

Following this theme of trust, we also need to ensure we are making the institution stronger by guaranteeing the independence of its arm's-length bodies. The sexual misconduct response centre, SMRC, our office and other military and civilian authorities need to be protected against the possibilities of outside influence and even the perception of it. Without additional measures put in place to solidify this independence, trust will continue to erode.

On a second theme, we are all aware of the culture crisis that the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence now suffer. Stories about misconduct continue to drive the news cycles. As a result, we know that talented, well-trained people have left the Canadian Armed Forces because they were directly affected by these stories, or as a result of how the military responded to them. Though difficult to measure, this has likely impacted recruitment as well. The overall culture in the military, including its initiatives to promote inclusion and diversity within its ranks, continues to suffer.

Though we have seen promising organizational changes, such as the standing up of the chief professional conduct and culture, we are far from seeing the results of anything that would constitute substantial change on the horizon.

The Chair: Ombudsman Lick, we're well over the five minutes for your statement. I wonder if you could wind it up, and then we can get to questions with members.

Mr. Gregory Lick: Okay. Very good.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Gregory Lick: I think I'll just focus, then, on the last theme, family matters.

The government's defence policy, "Strong, Secure, Engaged", places its commitment to its people. There are still major challenges facing members of the defence community on the home front. Overall, I've heard good reports about those transitioning to civilian life in the new process of transition; however, our office continues to intervene in cases where a member is days, if not hours, from release and lacks appropriate preparation.

In conclusion, we need a system in which people trust that they'll be treated fairly. We need a culture of respect for every individual within the Canadian Armed Forces and in the Department of National Defence, and we need support for our families, because they are the backbone of the members who serve us.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I see Mr. May.

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): I'm sorry for the interruption, Mr. Chair.

During the introduction, the English translation was coming through at the same volume, which made it very difficult to hear. Hopefully we can fix that moving forward.

The Chair: It appears to have been something to do with the witness selecting a particular button on the particular console, which is now, apparently, fixed. I hope it's working now. Thank you.

Colleagues, since there's only one presentation of five minutes, I think we can go to a six-minute round, starting with Ms. Findlay.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Ombudsman. It's good to see you again.

I'm obviously concerned about what you're saying about the grievance system when you talk about something taking nine years. Can you expound on the problems with the grievance system a little more?

Mr. Gregory Lick: The major problem with the grievance system that we are hearing—and one of the reasons that we do intervene more often and earlier in some of the complaints because of compelling circumstances—is those delays. Certainly what we're hearing is that there's a resource issue, in not having sufficient resources in order to be able to support the grievance system.

I truly and firmly believe that there are more systemic issues underneath. For one, are people accountable for supporting the grievance system, whether that's in the chain of command, at the initial authority level or at the final authority level? There are deep issues in there, and it's one of the reasons we have decided in our systemic investigation plan to look at these recourse mechanisms next year, the following year, to determine what those deep issues are that are causing this cycle of delays to occur over and over again. Every time resources are thrown against it, the backlog comes down but the delays keep reoccurring.

There are some systemic issues there and we need to find out what they are.

• (1655)

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: I imagine it would also be hard on the mental health of the members and their families, because uncertainty is never good when there's an issue.

DND has been sitting on a comprehensive military family strategy. Can you elaborate on that issue and what it means to military families?

Mr. Gregory Lick: Certainly on the comprehensive military family strategy, when it came out and we were briefed on it about three years ago, we were very, very supportive of it. Any way we can support our military families, who are, as I said and as it is commonly termed, the “backbone” of the military members in order to support them while they're serving.... If there's anything we can do to be able to support them better, that is vital.

The issue we've seen with this particular strategy is that it's supported in principle, but it needs to be resourced and it needs to be implemented. That hasn't occurred yet.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: When was it initially put forward?

Mr. Gregory Lick: I believe it was in 2018, but I'll ask Robyn if she has an update on that.

Ms. Robyn Hynes (Director General, Operations, National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman): Thanks. It was originally called the comprehensive military family plan, which has since kind of morphed into the comprehensive military strategy as they took the initiatives from within the plan and put some implementation steps to them. As the ombudsman said, although the report has gained approval and endorsement from the chain of command, it is also my understanding that the resourcing has not been approved for the implementation of the strategy.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: My husband often says to me, a good—

The Chair: Ms. Findlay, just a second.

Ms. Hynes, the microphone, I'm sure, is causing the translators grief. I think it has to do with the position of the microphone.

We'll see if that works.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: I was going to say that, as my husband often says, a good plan in action is better than a perfect plan on the drawing board. It seems to me that three and a half or four years is plenty of time to get something moving.

For the ombudsman, why do you think people are leaving the military and why are they staying, in your view?

Mr. Gregory Lick: As I said in my opening remarks, I think there is a crisis of trust within the military around whether people are going to be treated fairly. That is the core part of our mandate. When people come forward to us, they're looking for fair treatment and we try to help them get that.

The other element, though, is that the misconduct crisis that is clearly in the news and continues to be in the news is certainly causing people to lose trust. When they do come forward when there's a situation of misconduct—whether it is sexual or some oth-

er abuse of power—they want to know that they will be treated fairly. They want to know that they will be heard. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] to deal with that particular situation.

The other one is that, as I go around to various bases and wings, I hear from families and members who are having a difficult time being able to afford housing. We are seeing policies, as some of the other witnesses have said, that are outdated and not agile enough to keep up with the economic factors that are affecting not only the military, but of course all Canadians, with respect to housing, inflation and so on. Some of those policies, like the post living differential, have not been updated. The rates have not been updated since 2008. The economy and the economic situation across the country have changed. That has created very much a situation of unfairness for a lot of members and a lot of families across the country.

There's a whole variety of reasons why people have decided to leave, but I truly believe it comes down to the basics. There's a lack of trust that the system will treat you fairly. There needs to be a change in the culture of respect and more respect for the individual. We need to help the military families and support them better in supporting our members.

Seamless Canada is an initiative that is trying to help deal with that with the provinces and territories, but this is an area that I strongly believe the Prime Minister and first ministers need to deal with quite directly with the provinces and territories.

• (1700)

The Chair: We have to leave it there. Thank you.

Ms. O'Connell, you have six minutes.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you both for being here.

I want to pick up on that grievance process as well. You spoke about [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] in some of these cases and the backlogs, but I have a question around whether all grievance cases are treated equally. I mean that in the sense of whether there is a prioritization of, say, a sexual harassment grievance versus a pay grievance. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] very challenging for the individual involved, but a grievance around, say, harassment might pose an imminent physical danger as well.

Mr. Gregory Lick: Certainly, I would expect that if there's imminent physical danger, it's not dealt with through the grievance process. If it is an imminent danger to an individual, that would be dealt with through the various law enforcement agencies or through the SMRC.

If we receive a complaint or a call from an individual who is in imminent danger or we feel, after talking with them, that they may be in imminent danger, then we will refer them to appropriate supports. That could be law enforcement or it could be the SMRC, depending on the situation. In that particular type of thing, that's something we do. We ensure that they are [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Robyn will have a bit more detail on that sort of prioritization as well.

Ms. Robyn Hynes: For any calls that we get about sexual misconduct, as the ombudsman mentioned, we really try to allow the person who is making the call and who has brought the issue forward to be in the driver's seat in terms of what their next step should be. We will provide them information about a variety of recourse mechanisms and resources available to them and allow them to make that choice. We also offer the service of doing that warm handover to help ease the process in that regard.

In terms of prioritization of grievances, we do have a process internally by which we can escalate files more quickly when there are compelling circumstances. That allows us to kind of go up the chain of command at a higher level than we normally would.

Internally, inside the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, there are a multitude of different recourse mechanisms, initial authorities and respondents, depending on the type of complaint that comes in. The process that gets followed is slightly different and it can be faster or slower, depending on what the complaint is.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you for that.

Just on that, part of the terminology, as I was reading the backgrounder and listening.... There is this approach of addressing unfairness [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. I get all that, and that's certainly a regular part of grievances, but there is a level of sexual misconduct that we have heard about in CAF. It might seem like a small thing, but to start to categorize sexual misconduct as unfairness and say that fairness needs to be restored in that regard also downplays it by categorizing some of these things in the same way.

Have you given any thought to your role in the ability to start saying that a traditional...? I know there's no such thing as a fully traditional grievance, but given the nature of the sexual misconduct cases and the systemic issues, is there not an opportunity to say that this is a larger issue than an unfairness piece, and that there should be a carving out or a categorization in the language that acknowledges what's been going on?

• (1705)

Mr. Gregory Lick: That's a very difficult question to answer, but I have to come back to the role of the office of the ombudsman. Just to reiterate that for everyone, and I've talked to a lot of you already, our role is to ensure that the processes that are available to people, whether for misconduct, sexual misconduct or any type of issue, grievance or situation that they may be dealing with....

Our role is an oversight role. It's to ensure that, whatever process they follow, first of all, they know what that process is and how to go about it. We refer them to that process. We may help them get started, and we may help them in terms of overseeing it during the process, but our role is to ensure that the process is followed fairly. They can always come back to us and say there's a delay and they're not getting answers, and then we may intervene with them at that point in time.

Truly, our role as an ombudsman, which is pretty much the same around the world, is to ensure that the processes are available to

people and that, in those processes, they are treated fairly. That's our role.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Connell.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Normandin, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Lick.

I am happy to see you again. Thank you for attending this committee meeting.

I would like to begin by reminding you of a public request you made about a year ago, in March 2021, when you asked the government to make your office truly independent.

According to media reports, you wanted your office to be independent, and you said that your office's structure undermined the confidence in your ability to fight for the members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Could you tell us about what you think was making your office insufficiently independent?

[*English*]

Mr. Gregory Lick: As I said almost a year ago, and I continue to say it to diverse audiences, there are a number of reasons you have an ombudsman's office. First of all, we are meant to be that civilian oversight—in this case, of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces—to ensure that people within the defence community are treated fairly, their complaints are heard and their complaints are dealt with.

One of the issues that we saw very clearly, primarily because of the sexual misconduct issues—

The Chair: I'm sorry again, Ombudsman Lick. We're apparently having some difficulties with translation.

We'll give it a go again.

Could you just continue with your answer, please? Thank you.

Mr. Gregory Lick: In this particular case, one of the reasons I came forward, and all of my predecessors before me had come forward, was to ask for greater independence, in particular reporting to Parliament as an officer of Parliament. It is to ensure that, as I said when I talked about the grievance system, there is greater trust that there is a completely independent—and perceived to be completely independent—organization that has oversight over, in this case, the Department of National Defence and the military. This is to ensure confidence in the system, that this organization is independent.

Over the years, we have seen interference in our office. We have seen our authorities changed without consultation. All those elements of administrative interference and direct interference cause issues of confidence. They also cause us some inability to carry out [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

One of the main reasons I asked for that independence was to be able to escalate a particular issue, whatever it might be, beyond just the minister. The minister—whatever minister and whatever party—is always a member of a certain party, and the issues that affect the military.... The military is a Canadian institution that is critical to all Canadians and needs to be heard by those who represent all Canadians, which is Parliament, and not to have any of the filters of any particular party in power as it goes forward.

In some cases, I may need to escalate that beyond Parliament and perhaps to the Prime Minister—any particular issues that we hear—because the importance of the military as a Canadian institution for national security is vital, and those issues, whatever they might be, need to be heard by Parliament. That is the main reason I've asked for greater independence.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Along the same lines, you asked to be able to report to Parliament rather than to the Minister of Defence. Last March, your predecessor, Mr. Walbourne, made the same request before you.

What is the status of that request? Do you feel that there is openness toward that request right now?

[*English*]

Mr. Gregory Lick: It's very difficult to speculate on what the government will do in that particular case. I have briefed the minister on this particular case, the same briefing that I've given to a number of audiences, including in my press conference last year and in the position paper that I put forward at that time.

The minister is very knowledgeable about governance issues as it reflects corporate governance. I think it was a good conversation, but I cannot say at this point in time where it will go. I will continue to push for it. I think it is the right thing to do.

Like every ombudsman before me, I came into this office thinking that I could work within the system to be able to support the defence community in achieving fairness, as much as we could, but I've seen very directly the issues that all the other ombudsmen before me have seen and, in this case, I came around to the opinion—very strongly held now—that independence in reporting to Parliament is the right thing to do for the defence community.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Normandin. That's six minutes.

Next is Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, Mr. Lick, for coming today.

You've spoken about this broken redress system quite often, and how it's undermining the belief of members of the military that they can get that swift, fair review of their complaints. How many cases actually meet the complaint deadline?

Mr. Gregory Lick: I'll ask Ms. Hynes to respond to that. We do have the details of that, and we can forward that to the committee later on as well.

Perhaps Robyn can respond just to summarize that particular response.

Ms. Robyn Hynes: Sure. I happen to have the grievance ones right in front of me.

In the Canadian Armed Forces, there are two levels of grievance. There's the initial authority and then there's the final authority. The initial authority grievance level has 120 days to respond. It used to be 90 and subsequently was increased to 120. At the final authority, there are actually no timelines associated with when final authority has to make a decision.

On the last numbers I have, for the grievances at initial authority there were 566, and 307 of those were pending a decision longer than four months. For the final authority grievance level—again, I'd be happy to provide these numbers afterwards—there were 687 files at final authority. Over 340 of them were waiting from one to four years for a decision, and 33 of them were still outstanding at four to nine years.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I mean, that's significant. That, of course, would have a huge impact in terms of people's faith, I guess, in that system. That would get around. That would go through the forces in terms of their understanding.

In the brief that you provided to this committee, you spoke a lot about families. You spoke about the care given—child care, housing care, family care, parents with children with special needs, and aging parents. That's a lot of what we talk about in terms of women and how that caring work falls on women. Is that the most common complaint you hear coming through to your office? Or what is the most common? Maybe you can give us an idea.

• (1715)

Mr. Gregory Lick: Robyn has a lot of those details. Certainly, the most common complaint we receive is around benefits. I will say, though, that when I do visit the bases and wings, obviously a bit more virtually nowadays, the most passionate points that come up are from families and from members who have family issues, whether it's child care, access to child care or affordable child care. I will say that there is a bit more optimism now with respect to affordable child care coming to everyone, but there will still continue to be some capacity issues until that catches up with everyone.

The most passionate individuals are those families with special needs children or families with disabilities. As they're posted from one base to another, in many cases they have to go to the bottom of a wait-list again. That is unconscionable. I've had to sit in various audiences with families where spouses are in tears about not being able to get their child's needs met and not being able to find a family doctor. That's something that many Canadians face, not just families of military members, but it is particularly problematic for those who have to move more often than a traditional Canadian family. Typically, they move three to four times, and they're dropped to the bottom of the wait-list for needs that are vital for their children. To me, that is unconscionable for the force, the organization that is defending us and putting their lives at risk.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I want to shift this a little. One of the things we heard consistently last year at the status of women committee through the study on sexual misconduct was the interference, of course, of the chain of command and how that impacted CFNIS and the SMRC. Have you seen a change in that? Have you seen a recognition of that problem, the role that the chain of command had played within investigations of sexual misconduct complaints, or have you not?

Mr. Gregory Lick: I would just reiterate for the committee that with regard to issues and complaints like that, which are criminal in nature, we will refer them to the proper law enforcement agency to deal with. That is not within our mandate to deal with.

As to the issues that are non-criminal in nature, it's hard to say at this point, I think, whether we're seeing a significant change in the chain of command properly dealing with them. I think we'll see that over time. I think the hope is that we'll see that over time. With the greater visibility of these things that we see in the media, I think there's a lot more heat and light on the chain of command to properly deal with these things.

In discussing this issue with the chief of the defence staff, he has very much said to me that he is holding these people to account, holding the chain of command to account. We will see; our job is to see that over time and see whether that is really happening.

Certainly, we will receive complaints every once in a while. Perhaps Robyn can give an example of one. We hear complaints over time that there are delays in getting a process or misconduct issue dealt with. That is very typical of some of the complaints we hear.

Perhaps Robyn can give you an example.

• (1720)

The Chair: Unfortunately, we're going to have to leave it there. Hopefully you can work in your example somewhere else.

Colleagues, we are having our typical problem in that we have 25 minutes' worth of questions and 20 minutes of time. We'll start to have our own grievances coming forward if we don't respect our staff.

With that, Mr. Motz, go ahead for four minutes, please.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you, Chair.

Ombudsman Lick, it's good to see you again. Robyn, thank you for being here.

Sir, you mentioned that the most common grievances that you as an office are receiving have to do with benefits and family-related matters. When you say "benefits", what specifically are you referring to? Do those involve the Phoenix pay system?

Mr. Gregory Lick: I'll answer the last [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] on the benefits question. Phoenix is definitely one of the questions and one of the complaints we receive from civilian employees of the department.

I'll ask Robyn to answer the first part of your question.

Ms. Robyn Hynes: Thank you.

On the benefits side, it's really anything to do with compensation and benefits. We get a lot of requests for information in this field. The CAF has a number of very complex policies and programs within it. A lot of the time people don't have a good understanding of what they might be entitled to.

We also see a number of complaints related to administrative delays in the receipt of those benefits. We also see some related to outdated policies on benefits. The ombudsman mentioned earlier the post living differential. Home equity assistance is also one that we hear about. On the civilian side, the largest one on the benefits side, as the ombudsman alluded to, definitely relates to pay and the impacts of the Phoenix pay system.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you.

This is more of a statement than anything. I guess I've always been troubled since, with the military base in my riding, we have dozens of individuals who have had Phoenix pay system issues that haven't been resolved, in some cases for up to several years. These affect pensions, income tax paid and collected, and whatever else. They've called and called and called to get those issues resolved within the military, within the Phoenix pay system. Yet, when the MP's office calls, generally we have those resolved within four to six weeks.

I don't understand why, when the employees themselves call, the department doesn't take it as seriously. We've actually been told by the department that unless an MP office phones, they don't pay any attention to them, which is really sad.

Mr. Lick, you indicated that you have backlogs, and Robyn provided us the timelines. Are those backlogs related to the time between complaint and resolution? Which has taken longer? Is it the investigation? Why is there a backlog? Is there a backlog in getting ministerial support or chain of command support to deal with a complaint, or is the backlog within your particular office with staffing or funding? What does that all look like?

Mr. Gregory Lick: When we're talking about the backlog, we're talking about the backlog in the grievance system itself, which is the internal mechanism available—in this case to military members we're speaking about—within the department. It's not within our office per se.

We see some of the same situations you were just talking about, such that if we call with respect to a grievance, we will sometimes see a quicker response and quicker action on that.

We try to do that only when there are compelling circumstances. Just because you call us, our role is not to put you up at the top of the queue, because if we did that every time somebody called us, that would be unfair. Where we see there are compelling circumstances...and every situation is a little bit different. There are a variety of reasons for that. This is one of the reasons we will be doing a systemic investigation into recourse mechanisms next year.

We feel it is not simply a resource issue. We've seen that over the decades. Throwing resources at it gets it down for a short while, but it comes back. Why? That is the answer we want to delve deeply into.

I have some ideas—

The Chair: I'm sorry again to interrupt you, but Mr. Motz's time has expired.

Mr. May, you have four minutes.

Go ahead, please.

• (1725)

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

Witnesses, thank you for being here.

The Office of the Auditor General's 2016 report on CAF recruitment and retention determined that the lengthy recruitment process, training delays, and files being closed when applicants were still interested “contributed to qualified candidates leaving the recruitment process.” The report also noted that “the average time to enrol...was approximately 200 days”.

In your work, have you noticed any [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] made to the recruitment process to address the concerns identified in that report?

Mr. Gregory Lick: Certainly, they are in the process now of putting some changes in place. The pandemic has had an impact on recruitment, as you've heard from other witnesses as well.

One of the most common reasons that we have complaints coming toward us is with regard to recruitment and the delays in recruitment. In fact, I was just speaking with a friend of mine the other day who is a reservist, and in discussion with his colleagues, it's the same issue that we hear all the time—that the recruitment process is simply too long. There are [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] that long, and there are many ways you can do things online. But there are some issues [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] the CAF is trying to address right now, simply so that the process is not too long.

I have to admit that on the civilian side of staffing, there are very similar issues. The processes are simply too long in order for both the civilian side of the department and the CAF to effectively compete with the people who are going to leave to go to the private sector.

Mr. Bryan May: Do you know the average time it takes to enrol currently?

Mr. Gregory Lick: I'm not sure of the time. I'm not sure if Robyn has a timeline on that right now. To be honest, I don't think it's changed that much.

I'll see if Robyn has the number.

Ms. Robyn Hynes: I don't know if that number has changed. I know there has been the introduction of two virtual tools that they've used, but I don't know what the success has been. I know they have the ability to do virtual enrolment and virtual selection, which are used through the recruiting centres now.

Mr. Bryan May: You mentioned that COVID-19 had an impact on recruiting during the pandemic. Would you also agree that COVID-19 caused some of those delays we were talking about earlier with regard to programs rolling out?

Mr. Gregory Lick: Which programs are you speaking about?

Mr. Bryan May: I mean specifically the ones supporting families. We were talking earlier in today's meeting about some of the commitments made by the CAF and that we're three years into the commitment. Would COVID-19 have played a role, in your opinion, in whether those programs have been rolled out?

Mr. Gregory Lick: I don't believe so. The comprehensive military family plan is something that was approved in principle. Essentially, everybody agreed this is something that we should do—in this case, the Canadian Armed Forces and the department. It simply needs the resources to be able to roll it out and implement it.

In terms of some of the other issues, that is in the domain of Seamless Canada and, in many cases, in the domain of the provinces and territories to deal with. I truly feel that it's not so much a COVID-19 issue. This is something that I believe really needs some strong political attention to be able to bring the provinces and territories together to deal with some very challenging issues, such as the professional qualifications of medical personnel across the country, which not only could affect, help and support the families that move across the country, but I believe it could also truly help and support Canadians in general.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. May.

Madame Normandin, you have 90 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I won't have time to hear your answer to another question on the transition of military members to civilian life and the transfer of their medical records. I will just put the following question to you, which is related to what you have already said.

The Standing Committee on National Defence will have to report to the House on the testimony it has heard and make recommendations. Should we recommend to the government that the ombudsman report to Parliament from now on instead of to the Minister of National Defence, as is currently the case?

• (1730)

[English]

Mr. Gregory Lick: The simple answer to that is yes. I would support that type of recommendation. I think that's evident. Certainly, the report or position paper I put forward last year provides what I feel is a strong case for that, as well as draft legislation that would enable that.

Yes, I would fully support that recommendation, but that's in the realm of the government and Parliament to be able to endorse.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: In that case, can you submit to the committee the documents you just mentioned? We would very much appreciate that.

Mr. Gregory Lick: Of course, Ms. Normandin.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

You have 90 seconds, Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you so much.

Unfortunately, you were cut off by our illustrious chair. You were about to say that you have an idea on why those backlogs continue to occur, and then he cut you off. I would like to provide you with the 90 seconds to complete your thoughts on that and to potentially provide us with those reasons.

Mr. Gregory Lick: Thank you very much.

Again, we will look more deeply into that in another year or so. However, I think there are a couple of areas. One is something that I discussed with the chief of the defence staff a little while ago: making sure that people are held accountable for dealing with a particular grievance in the process. In their performance management agreements, the chains of command—at least at the most senior level—all have commitments to make sure that the process is timely. We'll see how that goes.

Again, it needs to be resourced properly. I believe one of the areas is whether the chains of command are getting the proper advice in terms of benefit policy and proper interpretation of policy, in order to provide a fair decision in a timely manner. That could be an area. As well, are the grievance committees and the grievance boards being provided with the right people to be able to effectively deal with a grievance process?

It's not that I believe everybody would want to go and work for the grievance board, but I think it is important that we have good, quality people there in the long term, not just in the short term, to be able to effectively support the system. Without an effective, timely and fair grievance system, you will never gain the trust of the whole institution that you'll be treated fairly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lick.

Mr. Schmale, you have four minutes.

I bet you didn't know you were dealing with an illustrious chair.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Absolutely. I have only good things to say about you, Chair, and I appreciate the opportunity.

As I mentioned to the witnesses in the first panel, I'm not a regular member of this committee, so I apologize if some questions have been repeated.

You were talking about length of time. What is the average length of time to fix a problem or a grievance that is given to you or your office?

Mr. Gregory Lick: In our case, if a complaint is brought to us, we will refer the individual to the proper process to be able to get it resolved. As I said, it's a difficult question to answer, because if there are compelling circumstances.... Somebody could bring a complaint to us, as happened last summer, in which the complaints were nine years old and four years old in the grievance system already. They came to us at those points in time. We felt that the circumstances were compelling. If I remember properly, they were facing some financial hardship. We helped them deal with it, and we brought it to the attention of the final authority in this case. They were dealt with quickly, given the compelling circumstances in those particular situations.

It depends on when those complaints in the grievance process are brought to us, so it's difficult to answer your question in that regard.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: To be clear, for that example you gave, those nine years were going through the military process, and at that point they came to you or your office.

• (1735)

Mr. Gregory Lick: That's correct.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Okay.

I don't know if you can tell us this off the top of your head, but what is the most common grievance that you and your office receive?

Mr. Gregory Lick: As I said, of the types of complaints we receive, the highest ones over the 23 years of our existence are always benefits. It would be the same in the grievance process.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Okay.

When you need to reach out to the department itself, how reactive is the chain of command, or even the minister, to remedy some of these issues, depending on the severity and type, etc.?

Mr. Gregory Lick: As I've said to a number of you already in our one-on-one briefs, when we have a complex case that we investigate, which could be one or two issues involved in it, or a very complex singular one—and those complex cases are certainly not all of the 14,000 calls we get in a year—when we investigate and we find that the situation is unfair for the individual, and we make a recommendation to the department, over the last five years, 100% of those have been accepted and implemented or are in the process of being implemented.

I've said to many of you that it's based on the respect that our investigative work receives, but I believe it's also that there are a lot of good people who want to do the right thing in the department. That's my belief.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: This might be a bit of a strange question. I'd understand if it is, but I'm curious. Out of the grievances, as you mentioned, that were able to be resolved, do you know any off the top of your head that resulted in punishment in the ranks or demotions or anything like that?

Mr. Gregory Lick: We have to remember that a grievance a member brings forward is typically in the area of benefits. They believe they are entitled to a benefit. It is not a part of the disciplinary process. That is a separate process altogether.

A grievance is something where you feel you've been treated unfairly or you're owed a benefit, and you're asking for the decision-maker to look at your case and decide whether you should receive that benefit or receive a service, whatever it might be. It is not part of the disciplinary process.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Schmale.

The final four minutes are for Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the ombudsman and his team for joining us today and for their expert testimony.

I was listening to the questions and listening to your opening statement. It focused on the fact that you deal more with issues that would cause someone to leave the military. I'm wondering if you're able to take any data from what you hear through grievances and apply it to the process to provide answers on how we might do better with recruitment. I'm flipping it around a bit. I'm wondering if you can take anything from those things—they're not exit interviews, but potentially grievance issues that lead to an exit.

Is there a way of flipping that upside down and finding a way to improve our recruitment process?

Mr. Gregory Lick: Certainly. When we receive a complaint, or even a request for information, a lot of the information fills our analysis of trends. In this case, we are always looking at these complaints and requests for information and the actual investigations that may be carried out as a result of those complaints, and we're looking at those trends to see if there are some systemic issues in there that we need to look at more deeply. That fills our systemic investigation plan.

In this case, I've just sent off to the minister a report on compassionate postings and compassionate status. It was a particular area that I was hearing about not only when I went to various bases and wings, but also in the complaints and requests for information that we receive on our phone lines, in our emails and so on. That told us there was a particular issue there. Perhaps the policy wasn't being

properly interpreted or it was inconsistent across the country and people were being treated unfairly.

That report is with the minister now. It will come out in the late April/May period publicly. In there will be some recommendations around how people should be treated.

We will do the same thing for recruitment if we see that there are particular issues there. The main issue we have seen, and Robyn can speak in detail to it, is the long delays that we receive complaints about. I haven't been able to get an answer.

Those are the typical issues we hear, as well as some areas where people feel they have been unfairly denied access to becoming a member of the military. However, definitely delay is the most common one.

● (1740)

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you for that. That's helpful.

This may not be a fair question to ask the two of you, but when it comes to retention and people's decisions to leave the CAF, how much of that would be based on negative issues that might lead to grievances, and how much of it might be better pay from the private sector or the decision that they don't want to move the family anymore or things like that? What percentage of the people leaving the CAF would be leaving for issues under the grievance file rather than other issues?

Mr. Gregory Lick: It's a very difficult one for us to answer. The commander of military personnel would be the best person to answer that type of question.

Certainly, in the types of requests for information we get, or in complaints, we definitely see areas.... We will generally receive the ones where people feel they've been treated unfairly. We don't generally receive a complaint about a person leaving because they want to go to another job. We don't get those types of complaints because they're not really complaints.

In the complaints that we do receive, we see various areas where either there are family issues and they cannot deal effectively with the family situation and continue to be a member of the military, or they cannot access health care appropriately and need to stay in the area where their children, spouse or partner can be taken of.

There are a variety of reasons why people will leave the military. It's certainly in the realm of the commander of military personnel to be able to best answer what the trends are in that area.

The Chair: We're going to have to leave it there, Mr. Fisher.

Ombudsman Lick and Ms. Hynes, on behalf of the committee I want to thank you for your contribution to this study. It's been very useful and we appreciate your time.

Colleagues, we stand adjourned.

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