

Good afternoon,

Thanks for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Mike Peterson. I'm a retired Combat Engineer Sergeant. I enrolled in the military in 2006 and released in 2017. During that time, I was posted to 1 CER in Edmonton, CFSME in Gagetown, and 2 CER in Petawawa. I deployed to Afghanistan twice; once in 2009, and again in 2011.

I loved the military, the military was very good to me, and I look back on it fondly. I thought I would be a career soldier. Eventually I got married and had a family, so it was time to look for alternatives. In January 2017 I began working for Canada Border Services Agency as a uniformed Border Services Officer. I'm posted to the Peace Bridge Port of Entry in Fort Erie, ON.

Working as a BSO for CBSA is everything I hoped it would be. Leaving the military was hard, harder than I had anticipated. But having a good job like I do made the transition much easier. I'm convinced that the federal Public Sector is a great opportunity for ex-military.

I have a few suggestions on ways public sector employment could be made more appealing to the veteran community. I believe that changes to the pension buyback, changes to the CAF release process, and mandating that all bargaining units in the federal public sector recognize military time for seniority would help attract veterans.

I'm not an expert on pensions or the legislation that governs them. My pension buyback is still in the works, over 2 years after leaving the CAF. I know many veterans waited several years for their pension buyback to go through. It would be better if it was more transparent, and if there was an easier way to know how much a CAF pension would count for in the public service pension plan. The pension package I received when I released was confusing, and every time I called the pension office it seemed I was being told something different. I think if military members were able to clearly see how much their CAF pension would count for in the public service it would help in their decision making.

The CAF release process can hinder members under contract from securing employment prior to releasing. When a military member wishes to release before the end of their contract they must submit a request for a Voluntary Release. These are generally granted, but the amount of time from the when the request is submitted to the actual release date can be 6 months. The biggest driving factor that causes members to be held for six months is the health of the trade with respect to staffing. If a trade's effective strength (meaning how many soldiers they have, as opposed to how many they're supposed to have) is in the "red" they will approve the release request, but the release date will be six months later. This is understandable, the military needs to consider operational readiness. For members with families and mortgages this can be a challenge. It makes it almost impossible to secure employment prior to

submitting a request to release. No employer wants to wait 6 months from the time they hire someone to the time that person can start working. Someone in that situation has 2 choices: they can hope they find an employer that will wait 6 months, or they can request a release and start looking for employment once it's approved. I know for me, and I suspect many military members are the same, I couldn't release from the military without knowing that I had gainful employment secured prior to submitting my request for release. It is possible to request an early release, even if the trade is "red", but in my 11 years in the army I only saw 2 such requests granted in my trade; and one of them was my release. Perhaps if the military had an exception to the 6 month wait for members entering the federal public service. That way military members, even those with families and significant financial responsibilities, would feel more comfortable releasing from the CAF by knowing they would be employed upon release.

This next point is very important to me. Time spent serving in the military should be recognized for seniority purposes in the federal public service, it should not be up to the various bargaining units to decide how they recognized time spent in the military, it should be mandated. I can only speak to my current employment and our collective agreement, though I believe this issue spreads across the entire federal public service. Most departments/agencies recognize military time for vacation accrual, but not for seniority. There was a brief period that military time was recognized by our union and management to count for seniority and for vacation accrual. That's how it was when I was going through the BSO selection process and when I started working. I remember at the interview for my job with CBSA I was told that because of my military time I would get more vacation time, and I would get seniority. The seniority was the icing on the cake because I knew summer and Xmas vacation was chosen in order of seniority. This all changed with our new collective agreement in June 2018. In this new agreement they changed what types of previous employment is recognized for seniority. The new agreement still allows, as it did before, anyone with previous employment anywhere in the federal public service to have their time count for seniority purposes, however the new wording specifically excludes ex-military members from this provision. Military time is still recognized for vacation accrual, just not for seniority. I feel very strongly that the issue of how to recognize military time should not be left up to a paragraph somewhere in a collective agreement. It shouldn't even be a question if time spent as a soldier with DND should be recognized in the same way as someone from Parks Canada, CFIA, etc. And I hope that's clear, on the issue of seniority I'm not suggesting that veterans be given any sort of preference at all, I'm merely saying we should be treated the same as everybody else. I believe that if the way military time is recognized in the federal public service it would help attract more military members.

I loved my time in the army, and I love what I'm doing with CBSA. I think CBSA would benefit from getting more vets in their ranks. Thanks for taking the time to listen to me, and thanks for having this committee and trying to help vets with employment in the federal public service. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

Sgt Mike Peterson (ret'd)