

Brief for:
Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates
Hiring Veterans for Public Service Positions

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I served in the Royal Canadian Navy for 32 years in areas of communications, human resource management, security, administration, and policy development. Since prior to my retirement in May 2017, I have applied to over a dozen positions in the federal public service. I have also initiated at least a dozen other applications only to give up when I realized that the competitions were designed to limit access to people outside the department.

Despite feeling confident of my submission in of these applications, I have had only one situation where I felt confident a department was conducting the hiring process in good faith. This experience was with Veteran's Affairs where the application questions, testing and interview process appeared genuine throughout. Unfortunately, the positions that I was considered for were in cities that were not practical for me to relocate to.

My other attempts at employment were with departments with a presence in Niagara Ontario. These included CBSA, Parks Canada, Transport Canada, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, and Employment and Social Development Canada. All of these postings requested skills and experience that are easily transferred from military experience and I felt very confident that I would receive at least an interview – but time passed and only one or two applications seemed to progress at all. In most cases these jobs were internal positions, and despite the notice that CAF members and Veterans were encouraged to apply, there was no evidence that any real consideration is given to us.

In one application with Parks Canada that was open to the public, I moved through the lengthy process and found myself among 5-6 candidates in a final testing session prior to promised interviews and hiring. I did well on the test, yet weeks later the process was cancelled, and a new job posting for the same position was posted shortly afterwards. This posting contained requirements which would keep out people who were not already connected to Parks Canada. At the test, there were two candidates that were on a first name basis with the invigilator and obviously well known in the office. As it was a public competition, I would have been granted hiring priority to personnel off the street - yet it was clear that I was not wanted even if I did meet their original criteria and had experience that would have benefited their organization.

I have contacted the Veterans Public Service Unit to see if there were issues with my applications, resume style, or the manner in which I am describing my skills and qualifications. This experience was quite positive and helpful, and they felt that I was doing all I could do to be considered. Ultimately the problem appeared to them and me that in areas where there are

limited military personnel such as Niagara, there is little knowledge among the hiring teams about what we offer. In cities such as Ottawa, Halifax, or Victoria a large number of veterans live among the community and work in concert with local federal departments. In Niagara, aside from a few reserve units and a small joint maritime operations centre, there is no military presence.

I think this reveals a serious deficiency in the concept of encouraging the hiring of veterans across the public service. Over the years public service managers have had to take seminars and courses to help them understand the needs and unique capabilities of recent immigrants, people of diverse ethnicities, and considerations of gender in hiring. We now have a diverse public service that appear to reflect many aspects of the Canadian demographic. Veterans are also a unique group. Many have skills and experience that should be highly beneficial to public service organizations – and a great deal has been invested in them by the GoC already. Unfortunately, it appears that for many Canadians we are an enigma – they don't really know what we offer, and I believe that this carries over to many public service employees and managers who do not know who we are or what we do. They may be influenced by a perception of military formed from movies or isolated news clips, they may be concerned that we will not fit in to their office cultures, or just suffer from the fear of the unknown.

Another serious issue with the current hiring system is that it ignores the fact that managers will understandably want to protect and promote their own. Why would they want to bring someone from outside when they can reward a loyal subordinate (or move out a troublesome one) by using the competition process. They may not want to deal with an unknown who could be skilled enough to challenge them or their staff favorites for future promotions. This is human nature.

Ultimately, if the government is serious about having veterans serve in public service positions across Canada, there will be a need to provide training, and firm criteria to managers to ensure they understand the capabilities and benefits of hiring veterans. Taking this further to include centralized hiring processes will prevent the kind of exclusions that appear to be happening to veterans under the current system. The concept of promoting the hiring of veterans is admirable, but unless there is some way to ensure that the encouragement is producing results, the effect on veterans is actually quite negative. After all, if our own government do not see us as a valued resource and will not hire us, why would we expect private industry to?

After over two years of attempting to find work with the public service, I have all but abandoned my quest to join the public service. I do know of a great many outstanding personnel who will be releasing from the CAF in the coming years, and the government owes it to them and to the people of Canada to create a system where veterans are given real opportunities to continue their service to their country.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this brief.

Sincerely,

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SUMMARY: In order for the goals of hiring veterans in public service positions to be met, clear hiring criteria, centralized selection processes, and education for managers and HR staff is required. Without changes to the system, the program ends up being a negative experience for veterans who will feel let down by a system that does not seem to value their experience, training, and qualifications. If the government will not hire its veterans, why would private industry?