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Chair

Mr. Tom Lukiwski

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• (1640)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC)): I will convene the meeting and we are in public.

We have with us today, representatives from Veterans Affairs Canada. I understand that we have either one or two opening statements.

Could you please inform the chair how long you think each of your statements will take? I'm trying to do a little scheduling in my head.

Ms. Kiran Hanspal (Director General, Human Resources, Chief Financial Officer and Corporate Services Branch, Department of Veterans Affairs): We've timed it as 10 minutes total.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

Welcome, Madam Hanspal and Madam Douglas.

I don't know which of you wants to go first, but the floor is yours.

[Translation]

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: Good afternoon, everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Veterans Affairs Canada has put in place several measures to contribute to the government's commitment to helping veterans and releasing Canadian Armed Forces personnel find meaningful employment to support a successful transition from military to civilian life.

[Translation]

I would like to share with this committee some of the many initiatives undertaken by the department, both internally and within the public service.

[English]

I will focus on initiatives led by the human resources division and my colleague Libby Douglas will speak to initiatives that also support private sector employment.

On departmental hiring with the Veterans Hiring Act, Veterans Affairs Canada, as other federal departments, is subject to this act and has made veteran hiring a departmental priority. To increase recruitment, our deputy minister established an aspirational goal of

having veterans represent 10% of the department's workforce by July 1, 2020. As of December 2018, the percentage of self-identified veterans increased to 7.3%, from 5.9% in June 2017.

In terms of staffing practices, we have integrated various hiring practices within the department to promote the recruitment of veterans. For example, Canadian Armed Forces experience is used as an asset qualification in all of our statements of merit criteria, and more recently as an essential qualification for target recruitment. In addition, in the area of selection, we have also opened it to veterans and Canadian Armed Forces members.

In terms of the veterans in the public service unit, it was launched during the 2017 Invictus Games in Toronto. This unit is the first service of its kind to solely assist veterans in navigating the federal public service hiring process. The unit is comprised of two subunits: the strategic human resources initiative and the service delivery subunit.

On strategic human resources, we work in partnership with the Public Service Commission and the HR representatives and hiring managers from across the federal public service to promote best practices in the hiring of veterans and to offer guidance on understanding the training, experiences and skill sets presented by Canada's veterans.

Information obtained through this working group is promoted with veterans who are registered in the unit. For example, we promote job opportunities, career events and targeted social media messages.

The service delivery subunit involves veterans serving veterans. Veteran advisers provide direct support to veterans seeking public service employment.

[Translation]

The advisors not only understand the hiring process, but most importantly the culture, the needs and the credentials of the veterans. They help the veterans express and showcase their acquired military training and experience in relatable civilian terminology.

[English]

As of April 26, 2019, more than 600 veterans had connected with the veterans in the public service unit for some level of service.

Another initiative that we undertook was the 2017 Invictus Games. As just mentioned, the Government of Canada's presence at these games was an early success of the veterans in the public service unit. At this event, the department led the participation of several federal government departments, representing the offering of over 70 job advertisements for diverse public service employment opportunities across the country.

Another experiment we did were the second career assistance network seminars. In 2018, VPSU, the hiring unit, piloted using Canadian Armed Forces second career assistance network seminars as a way to promote federal public service jobs to releasing members.

During these events, departments, led by Veterans Affairs Canada, were able to actively engage in face-to-face conversations with releasing Canadian Armed Forces members and promote the public service as an employer of choice, while highlighting available local opportunities, because that's a preference for veterans.

[Translation]

This was a proactive approach to connect veterans with hiring organizations prior to their release date.

I will now yield the floor to Ms. Douglas.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas (Director General, Service Delivery and Program Management, Department of Veterans Affairs): Thank you.

My name is Elizabeth Douglas. I am the director general of service delivery and program management at VAC. I am here today to speak about the education and training benefit, as well as the career transition services benefit that was put in place to support veterans regarding their next steps following transition from military life.

The education and training benefit as well as the career transition services were introduced April 1, 2018. For many veterans and their families, a meaningful post-service career is key to financial security and mental and physical well-being.

[Translation]

This benefit helps veterans achieve their education and employment goals, and positions them to be more competitive in the civilian workforce.

[English]

The education and training benefit provides funding to support veterans who want to further their education with university, college or technical training. Eligibility includes veterans with at least 2,191 days of authorized paid days of Canadian Armed Forces service, so six years. These veterans can receive up to \$40,960 in funding to support their educational goals. Veterans with at least 12 years of service, or 4,382 authorized paid days of CAF service, can receive up to \$81,920. Of this funding, up to \$5,120 can be used for short courses. These need to be courses that are generally available to the public.

In terms of the formal programs, the requests for funding are varied. Among the top 10 types of programming are bachelor's and

master's degrees and Ph.D.s, along with flight training and trades training. Short courses are spread across various topics. For example, project management and leadership courses are of great interest to many.

In terms of the way forward and the year ahead, one challenge VAC faced soon after implementation of the education and training benefit was that supplementary reservists were not eligible for the benefit. A change to make supplementary reservists eligible was announced in budget 2019 and will come into force on July 5, 2019.

With regard to career transition services, first-class military training and experience has helped veterans develop a variety of skills during their time as members of the Canadian Armed Forces, and Veterans Affairs Canada wants to help veterans use these skills to achieve their goals in life after service.

• (1645)

[Translation]

The Career Transition Services provide a broad range of supports and are delivered by a national third-party contractor, Agilec.

[English]

Every eligible veteran who applies for CTS is assigned a qualified career counsellor, who also understands military life and culture. These counsellors use motivational interviewing techniques to help veterans and their spouses find the path they want to take in life after service. Counsellors offer a broad range of services, including, for example, education counselling, job coaching, assistance with resumé writing, interview preparation or help to apply for jobs.

As for the year ahead and next steps, our focus will be on monitoring and evaluating the program to make sure it continues to meet its objectives, as well as developing a deeper understanding of the clients who are accessing the program.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, both of you, for your opening statements.

We'll now go into questions. Colleagues, we won't have enough time for a complete round before we adjourn, but we will have at least one and a half rounds.

Will we start with Madam Ratansi for seven minutes? I'm not sure. I don't have a list in front of me.

I'm sorry. Hold on. It's Mr. Jowhari for seven minutes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): May I suggest we go to five minutes?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Do you want to do five minutes each so everybody gets a chance?

The Chair: If you wish to do five minutes, colleagues, that's fine with me. It's your choice.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Then everybody would get a question.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go with five minutes, then.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for providing insight into some of the programs.

We heard from a lot of witnesses who told us there were a lot of services available for them when they were recruited. They got training. Their OHIP, their bank account and everything was taken care of. Their money was taken care of. However, as they were being released for various reasons, there was no process for them to reintegrate.

What I'm hearing, at least from testimony from Madam Douglas, is that, under education training and under career transition services, programs seem to be available. Some of them came in April 2018 and some are being launched in 2019.

When do these programs, especially education and training, start? Do they start after, or do they start during the time they have the heads-up that they're about to be released? What is the process? How are they informed about all of this?

• (1650)

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: With regard to the education training benefit, it came into place on April 1, 2018. You must have left the service to apply. However, having stated that, there is an incredible amount of promotion of this program going on. As you may be aware, there is a new transitional group in the Canadian Armed Forces, and they are trying, and we collaborate and partner with them, to really ensure that this transition process is a much smoother process. For example, we've just gone across the country to every base and met with thousands of members. The biggest question they had was with regard to the education training benefit.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: It's great that you've gone to the bases. I assume the armed forces at the bases are getting educated, but we are talking about the veterans. We're talking about the ones who are out of the service and who need the support. Those are the ones we are hearing from. What program do you have in place to reach out to the ones who are not on the bases and need the service?

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: A previous minister has had over 40 town halls over the past year. The minister of VAC has had over 40 town halls, and there was a lot of information disseminated on the education training benefit at that time. Over and above that, there is significant information available on our website, available through My VAC Account and available through social media.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Basically we're saying that we're reaching out, and it's up to them to reach out back to us. That's what I'm hearing.

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: We've had a significant number of applicants, in fact. I have the numbers here. As of March 31, there were 4,540 applications to the education training benefit. That was significantly higher than had been anticipated. We really are trying to do that outreach as best we can.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: On the career transition service, you talked about two groups. There is a group of counsellors who are

potentially previous veterans, and they can take the military language and turn it into civil language to help them through. Then there's this third party contractor who's providing all these courses. There were a number of courses, such as education, job coaching and assistance with resumé writing. What is the process for veterans to be informed? What is the process for them to qualify for this?

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: Again, with regard to the career transition services, one of the pieces that I should point out is, if you are still a serving member, you can use career transition services through social media all throughout, through My VAC Account, through the website, through these base visits, through the ministerial town halls, and also through the veterans priority service units.

To my colleague, would you like to follow up on that?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: We launched the veterans in the public service unit during the Invictus Games. It's been in place since September 2017. We used social media. We used—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but we're running a little short on time.

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: I'm sorry.

We used social media, veterans communities and SCAN seminars.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. McCauley, you have five minutes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Thanks for joining us today, ladies.

The reason we're doing this study is that we've heard repeatedly—it's not just anecdotal information—that we are failing our veterans in terms of offering them jobs in the public service.

Who should be the gatekeeper? Who should be responsible overall for giving our vets priority to get into the public service, as is required? You mentioned that you have an aspirational target. I'm disturbed that we don't actually have anything more than an aspirational one for either your department or other departments. Who should be in charge of this to ensure it actually gets done?

It's not you specifically, but Libby's pointing at you.

• (1655)

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: I cannot pronounce or provide an opinion on that but—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: What is your opinion?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: I can indicate that the Veterans Hiring Act is under the purview of the Public Service Commission and that all federal departments are subject to the requirements of the act. I'll be frank that before 2017, we had used the VHA support material to support the departments. With the veterans in the public service unit, we've really worked hard to bring the departments together to work with the Public Service Commission, because we can't do it alone; it's an exercise in learning.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That's why I'm asking the question. We've asked, and he believes he's doing his job. Everyone we've talked to believes they're doing their job, but I'm looking at an article from the well-respected David Pugliese. He comments that 75% of vets who have applied have had their five-year priority period time out before they can actually work. We have a problem, which is why we're doing this study. We're just looking for honest opinions.

Where are we dropping the ball? Is it at the hiring manager level, who is perhaps given too much discretion not to hire a vet so he's hiring a preferred person? We have the law, but obviously it's not being followed. Should Veterans Affairs be doing more?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: As head of human resources, I can speak to what the department, Veterans Affairs Canada, is doing. I'll tell you that within our division, we make sure we consider veteran priorities first, as per the law; that we consider mobility and preference, as per the law. We've launched the veterans in the public service unit and the strategic initiatives. We take it seriously. We're taking leadership and working with the Public Service Commission and bringing—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Should we have hard-coded quotas, do you think, per department?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: It's under each deputy's purview to decide how they staff—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Should we have a hard-coded quota for Veterans Affairs then?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: —under the auspices of the Public Service Employment Act and also the Veterans Hiring Act. Our deputy minister put out the challenge of an aspirational goal, so we're pursuing that rigorously.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: You talked about your units and your subunits getting veterans into the public service. How difficult are we making it if we actually need units and subunits to help them into the process?

I want to follow up. You talked about the Invictus Games at which you had what almost sounded like a hiring fair going on.

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: It was a career summit.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: We heard from other witnesses who were talking about hiring into the public service. They said they went to McGill and were offering jobs on the same day to people. Can we not do the same thing? Were we doing that at the Invictus Games? Can we not do something similar whereby we bring them into a job fair and hire them on the spot or offer them something on the spot?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: We did work with the departments and we provided conditional on-the-spot offers at the Invictus Games.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: How many did we get?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: I'll tell you something very interesting, and this is an experience we've also had at the career transition services.

Of the 684 people who have reached out to the veterans in the public service unit, a significant proportion are having exploratory conversations. They're just trying to understand what the entitlements are and what kinds of benefits they can get. They're just trying to understand what kind of career they want to pursue and whether the public service is a match for them or the private sector is a match for them. They're just thinking it through, and a lot of them are just trying to figure out what their next career will be. Once they do figure that out, then we step in and we provide them support.

The other part of the challenge is also that when veterans release and leave the forces, they want to land in a certain location, so they're looking for jobs that are close to home, somewhere they want to stay. That's what we've been trying to do, to find ways to have local career fairs.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Blaikie, you have five minutes.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Thank you very much for being here today.

One of the recurring themes in the testimony we've heard is that a real barrier or challenge to veterans successfully finding employment in the civil service is that the training and credentials they receive in their military life don't transfer well to civilian life. That's not because the skills don't work or aren't a match for the work they're going to perform in a civilian job, including in the public service, but because the credentials just don't hook up and aren't recognized in civilian life.

As a department that is aggressively pursuing ensuring the hiring of veterans, as per the act, as you said, is there anything you do as a department to try to recognize military credentials within your own department and that you believe is exemplary but is not already being done by other departments, or do you encounter a challenge in recognizing military credentials for veterans who you may be trying to hire? You know they have the skills, but you're not able to recognize those credentials.

● (1700)

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: I think a big part of the translation is taking the military credentials or even the experience, translating it into public service language and then also explaining that to the veterans. It's a two-part conversation.

On hiring, what we've done is to use Canadian Armed Forces backgrounds as asset qualifications, and now we've gone one step further. We have certain sets of jobs that we hire on regularly. We actually did three competitions just for veterans as an essential qualification. The statement of merit criteria were articulated in language that was plain and that did not exclude as much. In terms of "recent and significant experience", we didn't use that; we used "experience". Also, we did this in plain language.

Furthermore, to support this, in our strategic initiatives part of the veterans in the public service unit, we're holding management community fairs across the country precisely to educate managers on how they can write better statement of merit criteria to do precisely that, to educate people so they can do a better job.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: One of the things we've heard is that the military has a comprehensive list that details coursework and training that members of the military would take. I think it's called the NOC list. We've heard that the public service has its own kind of list that's not exactly the same, but there are recognized training courses within the public service and there is overlap.

Have you guys pioneered any work in trying to formally establish permanent equivalency so that as a civil service employer, when you get the list of military training, you can hook up what that means in the civil service language and, for instance, not put the burden of doing that on the veteran?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: Thank you for that question.

We actually have an important partnership with ESDC, the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence. We developed an important online tool called the skills translator. It basically takes a military occupational structure identification code and translates it into a civilian national occupational code equivalency tool. This tool is a military-to-civilian and civilian-to-military job translator. It's based on the CAF job-based specifications.

ESDC has a list of civilian occupations, so the Canadian Armed Forces members or veterans can use this tool to produce a civilian resumé or CV. On the flip side, hiring managers can use this tool to gain a deeper understanding of a variety of trades within the Canadian Armed Forces.

We are promoting this tool even within the public service, because it's fairly plain language. While we haven't developed a public service translator, this is pretty good. This is a very good tool.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Blaikie. That's the end of your time.

Madam Mendès, you have five minutes.

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

I will pursue this, because that's exactly where I wanted to go, to that aspect of it, the equivalencies of experience in the military and how they translate into public service, because the bottom line is that service is service, and military service is no less dedicated to the common good than public service. I think the element of commonality here is service.

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: Yes.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: You have people who are trained on a variety of domains that should translate reasonably well into civilian life. We've had examples such as ambulance drivers. An ambulance driver in an operational situation in the military can be an ambulance driver in the city. I don't think there's a big, big difference in terms of skills needed, but they have trouble getting their skills recognized by civilian society. I'm not just talking about public service, but civilian society in general. On the ambulance driver issue, for example, we get into provincial jurisdiction, which is another added burden to this.

It seems that because maybe it's very new, this skills translator that you just talked about, it's been a big issue for veterans so far. That five-year window to make a decision about where they want to go career-wise in the public service is sometimes not enough for the processing they need to do after they get out of the military. That skills translator doesn't help them—or didn't, because it probably didn't exist—to find the right window of entering the public service. A lot of them miss the five-year chance because they weren't accompanied until then in translating their skills into appropriate skills for the civil service.

You have that translator, but you told us that it's not in the public service.

• (1705)

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: This is a translator for civilian...so public and private sector opportunities.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Okay, and would public service managers accept that as a guideline for...?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: We're promoting it. We're educating managers. This is a fairly new tool, and a lot of innovation has happened in the last couple of years.

Now we're getting the word out. The interdepartmental working group we have for the public... I'll ask Libby to speak to the private sector element, but for the public sector, it's all about the engagement now: engaging the management community so they can see these tools, so they can see how easy it is to hire a veteran and to understand their skills and competencies.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: How advantageous it is too.

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: Pardon me?

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: How advantageous it is to hire a veteran.

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: Exactly.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Do you have any numbers on the progress made in hiring veterans over these past five years, for example? Are there any kinds of statistics on this?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: Yes, the Public Service Commission gathers data on the hiring of veterans across the public service.

In Veterans Affairs Canada, we have also had progress with our aspirational goal. For example, before the Veterans Hiring Act, there were about 141 in total who were hired from 2012-13 to 2014-15, and from 2015-16 to 2018-19, in total we hired 10,459.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: That's 10 times.

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: So it's making progress, definite progress.

I would suggest that you may wish to invite the Public Service Commission. They can provide more insight into this data and also provide insight on the practices of other departments.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: On the civilians, if you don't mind—the translator and the civilian applications of skills—how do veterans manage to translate their skills into the private sector? That was what you were—

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: Thank you for the question.

In terms of the private sector, we're really starting this work with the private sector. What we're finding is that very large companies are coming to us looking to hire veterans. We're also finding, as my colleague previously alluded to, that sometimes veterans who have undertaken a certain role within CAF do not want to pick up that same role after the fact.

This is a new area for us in terms of external hiring. It's something we're going to be working on, and something over the next year that we can come back and have a far better story for you as to what's going to happen.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. Albus.

Welcome to our committee. You have five minutes.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks to the members of the committee for having me here today.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for the work they do for our great country.

I'd like to start first with the aspirational target that has been set by the deputy minister. It's my understanding that July 1, 2020 is the date that he set. Is that correct?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: Yes.

Mr. Dan Albas: How is that coming along? It's 14 months and a few days away. Where are we right now, at 10% of total VAC staff?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: The target was set in June 2017. At that time we had a base population of 2,272, and 5.9% of our population in the department were veterans.

I just want to highlight one thing. To determine who are the veterans amongst us, the veterans have to self-identify, but it's not mandatory, and not everyone wants to self-identify. I just want to highlight that.

Since then, with all the measures, and using the 2,272 as my base population, as of December we hired 165 veterans. We are at a population of 165 but again, we did a self-validation exercise. We sent out an email and what have you.

It's moving. It's 7.3%.

• (1710)

Mr. Dan Albas: I'll ask you about that 7.3% again. We get more granular as we go along and understand some things, and I understand that there are always dangers in setting goals, but if you don't set something, then you don't try to achieve.

Of that 10% aspirational target, is there any sort of breakdown of x number in entry positions and x number in managerial or senior positions, or is it just that we don't care where as long as we have 10% of the total staff?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: It's 10% overall.

Mr. Dan Albas: Could you maybe let the deputy minister know that that might need to be examined? I don't think Canadians want to know that 10% of the staff are entry positions. I think, when we say we want to support veterans and we want to see the department have veterans, we also want to see them in a decision-making capacity, if possible.

I know public servants work very hard to do all the things that parliamentarians and government ask of them, so could you just pass that message on?

In regard to the career transition, I'd ask the same question. We know that if someone has four years, they can expect x amount of money, just over \$41,000. If it's 12 years of service, it goes up proportionately, and that's great.

What's the annual pickup on that?

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: The annual pickup to date right now with CTS, the career transition service—and it was the education training benefit with a dollar value that you have just cited—has been 2,200 applications, and 1,600 of those have been favourable. Of those, what we're finding is that many have indeed found employment, but we're also finding what I've just mentioned. Lots of times this is exploratory: What's available for me; what might I be interested in?

Mr. Dan Albas: Every institution across this great country will track the success rates of its students as they go through the program, and oftentimes there is even information to say if they've been hired and at what income level.

Do you do any tracking to make sure that, for public monies coming through Ottawa to support this program, there is that feedback loop to allow us to measure the level we're at? Can we compare it with someone who has just taken a Canada student loan who's not a veteran to make sure that we see income and successful work, not just successful completion of programs?

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: With regard to CTS and the education training benefit, they're a year old, so we're starting to do that tracking now, and we're starting to see the stats showing us where veterans or family members are going.

Mr. Dan Albas: Could you submit some of the measures so that the committee can see them? If you don't measure it, you can't manage it.

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: I'd be pleased to do so.

Mr. Dan Albas: I just wanted to point out that Dr. Kevin Wainwright of SITE Centre from BCIT originally worked with the local Legion to create the Legion military skills recognition program that would allow for Canadian Armed Forces veterans to put in their credentials and find out about equivalencies. The people running the program would be able to tell them, “Here’s what we will give you advance credits on; here’s what you need to complete to do this business program,” and they’ve been able to do this for a variety of different programs. There’s a consortium of colleges right across the country that the federal government supported a number of years ago.

The point I would have for you and for the public service—and again, I don’t have the public service in front of me—is that it may behoove us to ask someone like Dr. Kevin Wainwright, if you want to see more veterans working in the public service, to point out what training they need and also let them know in advance what will be recognized in terms of their service.

•(1715)

The Chair: Mr. Albas, I know you’re new to this committee, but as I am fond of mentioning to all committee members, when we give time allocated to members for an intervention, it’s for both the question and the answer.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Since we are completely out of time, that answer, if there is one forthcoming, would have to be submitted directly to the clerk, or perhaps another member would be able to take it up in their intervention.

Mr. Dan Albas: Now that is smart. Thank you for that intervention. I’d like to see that.

The Chair: I’m here to serve, Mr. Albas.

We will now go to Madam Ratansi for five minutes.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Thank you very much, Chair.

Ms. Douglas, I was looking at your notes. We have been listening to veterans a lot, and they want a meaningful transition from military to civilian life, but they want financial security and they want mental well-being. When I look at your career transition service, you indicate that every eligible veteran is assigned a qualified career counsellor through that third party. I want to know whether you have tracked to see whether veterans who have taken the career counselling have ended up in jobs, whether they be jobs in the private sector or the public sector. Has there been any tracking of that?

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: Again, because the program has just passed its first year, we are starting to collect those numbers. I would be pleased to submit the numbers that we have.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay.

It is interesting, because we heard from veterans and their spouses about the skill sets that are acquired by military personnel. If you are in Afghanistan and you’re fighting a war, you have to be tactical. You have to be strategic, etc. Veterans don’t know how to translate that into.... There’s no harmonization between the language of the military and that of the public service. We will take up the suggestion

that we should call in the Public Service Commission, because we want to know how many veterans are really being hired.

Ms. Hanspal, you talked about the 1,000-odd veterans who have been hired, but we have listened to witnesses who have been discharged. How many have passed the probation period and how many are still surviving in the veterans area?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: I’m sorry, I didn’t hear that.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: How many veterans are in the public service area? We were told that not many survive after the probation period. Are you aware of it?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: The number of people who are actually in the public service is the number I presented.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: They are working.

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: Yes.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: The question asked by Mr. Albas, I guess, was about the level they’re working at. Is it entry level?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: We have veterans who are in executive positions. In fact, my ADM is a former rear-admiral from the navy. We have people who are working at various levels within the department. We are actively pursuing commissioned and non-commissioned officers, looking at whatever opportunities line up. What I find interesting is that sometimes people do not necessarily want to work at a level that is commensurate with their level. They just want a change. It depends on what they want as well. That’s an important factor to take into account.

There is an important area that we do want to work more on. We started a mentoring network called Veterans Amongst Us within Veterans Affairs Canada to promote inclusion. Another important piece is that veterans do need some support in the transition to the public service life. We are also looking at how we can find mentors who can support veterans who are just coming into the public service to help them acclimatize to the public service culture.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: You talked about the vice-admiral. Those people don’t have a problem. It’s the lower level who leave the military and have a major problem with financial security.

We were told that there are only 75 identified veterans in a department that has 3,000 people. Can you explain why that is the case?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: Our current population is 165. It’s not 75.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay. Someone has given us information that we can clarify.

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: That’s what I—

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay.

My last question is for you, Ms. Douglas. You talked about the private sector wanting veterans. What is the main skill set they are asking for?

•(1720)

The Chair: Give a brief answer, please.

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: They haven’t identified a skill set.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: I have finished. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. McCauley, you have five minutes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Great.

I just want to get back to the Invictus Games. How many people were offered conditional jobs or jobs on the spot type of thing?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: I think it was—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: How many people applied?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: I'll need to validate the number, but I believe it was about five.

What I wanted to say was that the job offers were not close to where their homes were.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Right.

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: They were also, I think, surprised to be offered a job—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm not—

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: —and they wanted to go back and talk to their families.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I understand that. The part about where their homes are, are you finding that people are trying to stay at Gagetown, for example, or are they trying to...? Most of the jobs are in the major cities. I find it difficult to understand that we can't place vets where I would think they were moving back to. It sounds as if you're saying they want to stay in the cities where they're established at the time.

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: This is important feedback that we've received from our clients. Some may want to move, but some really want to stay where they have been. An example is the number of veterans who have moved to Prince Edward Island because they want to come to the island and that's where their family is. In our recruitment efforts now, we're looking at the locations of the various jobs, so we can promote locally, so we can hire people locally.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I want to discuss the power, I guess, of the local hiring managers in the department and how much of that is a hindrance to getting veterans on board. I understand they have power, so to speak, to set the hiring requirements—you have to be from a certain region, or you have to be from this department only, or we're not going outside our department. Do you think that is a major factor in the difficulty?

There's a big disconnect. The vets I talk to and whom we're hearing from explain it's very difficult getting into the public service, but witness after witness from the government side seems to paint a very rosy picture, saying it's that vets don't want to work for them. I'm not casting aspersions or doubt on what you're saying, but again, we have public servants presenting that “everything's great; we're doing everything; the vets don't want to come work for us,” but vet after vet says roadblocks are being put up. I'm just trying to get to where the roadblocks are. Have you looked at the power of the hiring managers in all the departments, to say it's too strong and you have to open this up?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: We have the tools and we need to educate managers—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay. It's not about—

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: —and that's what we're doing.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I find it odd. It's not about educating. It's like saying we have the tools and we have to educate the MPs to show up for question period. No, it's not that. We are required to be at question period. I don't know if you're trying to be politically correct with that term of educating, but it's not a matter of educating. It's that this is their job. We're not going to educate, for example, not to drink on the job. No, this is their job, to hire vets under the Treasury Board guidelines. Where's the disconnect?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: So, we have—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Do we have to go after every department one by one to say, “Do your job”?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: In Veterans Affairs, I can speak to what we're doing within our department. Within our department, we are promoting veteran hiring. We put in place targeted pools so that managers know that there are veterans—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Should there be a stronger role at Veterans Affairs to reach into other departments and say—

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: Pardon me?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Should there be a stronger role at Veterans Affairs to reach into other departments and say, “You are not doing your job in hiring veterans; you're not following the guidelines”?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: I cannot pronounce on a policy question like that, but what I can pronounce on is what's under the purview of HR. With the legislation that we have, we are operating within that legislation and we've developed some innovative tools. We're learning as we're going along and we're promoting these tools to improve managers' understanding of veteran competencies, because they're so well trained, and—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm running out of time. I'm just going to reclaim my time.

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: Okay.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: You talked about best practices in hiring vets. Could you share a couple with us? How do we get those to the other departments?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: So, for—

The Chair: Answer very quickly.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Yes, sorry. We're short on time, but give whatever you can offer.

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: Simply, it's about how to set up your statement of merit criteria, how to set up asset qualifications. We're setting up exchange sessions to do that with other departments.

• (1725)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Maybe you could send them in writing to our analysts, so we can get it into our report, because I'm out of time.

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: Absolutely.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks very much.

The Chair: Our final intervention will come from Madam Yip.

You have five minutes, please.

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

You mentioned there were three job competitions specifically for veterans, which is wonderful. How successful were those job competitions?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: They were just finalized. We've set up the pools, and I can give you how many people are in the pool. We are promoting those pools for jobs within Veterans Affairs Canada. I know we have already hired three out of the pools. I hired one of them.

We are setting up the HR plan this year, and we're going to be promoting those pools as part of the recruitment effort within the department.

Ms. Jean Yip: There were three competitions. Do you know the results of the other competitions that were held earlier?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: What's interesting about this competition is we took veterans' and Canadian Armed Forces' experience, and we made it essential, meaning only those who had that experience could apply. You need to be careful because you don't want to exclude other people, but we were very bold in doing that. This is an experiment.

We also have other pools where we have asset qualifications as Canadian Armed Forces. We have done that for the EX processes and for the non-EX processes. We are doing that regularly, and that's helping us too.

Ms. Jean Yip: Have you given any thought to having an online job bank for veterans where they can apply online and then companies can also see and maybe do some matching?

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: We are looking to explore that with career transition services and with Agilec. That was not part of the contract but we're looking to move into that area particularly as we spend more time and focus on external hires. Agilec on its own with our own information has started to create some of that bank, but we are going to have to follow up on it, and want to.

Ms. Jean Yip: What are the main skill sets that the private sector is looking for in veterans?

Ms. Elizabeth Douglas: Again, to date we've had companies come to us saying they'd like to hire veterans but they've not specified specific job trades or skill sets.

Ms. Jean Yip: In the advertised internal appointment process for the public service, how is this being reached out to veterans? Is it easily accessible to veterans? Is it specifically for the public service and it's internal?

Ms. Kiran Hanspal: I cannot pronounce on the public service. It's under the purview of the Public Service Commission.

Ms. Jean Yip: Am I done?

The Chair: You have about a minute.

Ms. Jean Yip: I have a minute, okay.

Does anybody else have something for a minute?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: You have 30 seconds—

Ms. Jean Yip: I know. I'm trying to...

An hon. member: You could just say thank you.

Ms. Jean Yip: Yes, thank you.

The Chair: We're just about out of time. We are just about to adjourn the meeting anyway.

Maybe I could take over and thank both of you for being here. As I mentioned at the outset, should you have additional information you think would be of benefit to this committee as we go forward with our study and ultimately write a report, I would encourage you, whether it be unanswered questions you wanted to respond to or additional information, to please provide that to our clerk. All the information you provide will help us to form our final report.

Colleagues, the meeting is adjourned.

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