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Chair: Mr. Bryan May



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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)): I'll bring this meeting to order.

I want to welcome all to meeting number eight of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on October 27, the committee is resuming its study of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the financial health of veterans organizations.

I'd like to welcome all of the witnesses who have taken time out of their busy days to join us today.

First, from the 420 Wing Oshawa Inc., we welcome Mike Gimblett, president.

Appearing as an individual, we have Max Gaboriault. Welcome to you, sir.

From the Royal Canadian Air Force Association, we welcome Linda Brimson, director of the 427 London Wing.

From the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada, we have Deanna Fimrite, Dominion secretary-treasurer, Dominion Command. Welcome to you.

From the True Patriot Love Foundation, we have Mr. Nick Booth, chief executive officer.

We have a very large panel here today, so we're going to get right into it. Each of you are going to have five minutes for opening remarks and then we'll get into rounds of questions from the members of Parliament.

My role is the official interrupter. That tends to be what I have to do more than anything. When you're speaking or when you're answering questions, there is a timeline. If we get down to one minute, you will see me raise my finger. Don't panic. A minute is a long time to wrap up your thoughts. You will see me do that throughout, whether it's with the questions or the opening statements.

We're going to get started with opening statements. To kick us off today, from 420 Wing Oshawa Inc., we have Mike Gimblett, president. The next five minutes is all yours, sir.

Mr. Mike Gimblett (President, 420 Wing Oshawa Inc.): Good afternoon, honourable members, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you.

Our small, independent club serves all veterans while leaning towards ex-Air Force. We have a heritage building, one of three remaining buildings left from the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan base in Oshawa, built in 1941 to train pilots for the war effort.

We are an independent, Ontario-incorporated, not-for-profit business entity whose mission is to serve our veterans and promote aviation in Canada. We also help sponsor three local air cadet squadrons financially and with the use of our building. We also support local groups that provide support to women in abusive relationships and the local soup kitchen to help the homeless. Being independent, we do not come under a central command structure, and we have no one to rely on but ourselves.

Our members are 95% seniors. For the most part, we are their only social life, and we are an extension of their family. Our members gather in our club to socialize with like-minded people and enjoy the camaraderie of this.

As a small, not-for-profit business, we do not have excess funds carried over each year. Our mandate ensures that any surplus we have gets invested in the people and programs we support.

We own our building and have a lease arrangement with the City of Oshawa to lease the land. The land, in part due to our efforts, is in the process of being designated a historically significant district to recognize the contribution to the war effort that we owe our freedom to.

We also rely very heavily on our core group of volunteers to do much of the heavy lifting to staff the club and provide our services to our older members. Because we keep our operating expenses low, we have not qualified for any of the programs so far such as the CEBA.

Our revenues are down approximately 80%—about \$60,000 so for this year. We were locked down and closed for three months this spring, and now with the latest red zone for Durham region, we are again closed and cannot have any people inside the building. We had to cancel two major rentals in December, resulting in further lost revenue.

During the first part of the pandemic, our monthly expenses were approximately \$1,000 per month, or \$8,000. We were able to cover these expenses by utilizing our patio for outdoor service when the weather permitted and running a take-out meal program every two weeks staffed by our volunteers, with much of the food needed being donated.

Now with the cold weather and being restricted to a maximum of 10 people inside, we have been forced to close until further notice. Our monthly expenses still continue for electricity, phone, Internet and water service, and now we have the added burden of heating the building and our snow removal contract. We are anticipating that our monthly bills for the winter will be \$2,000 per month, or \$10,000 for the next five months, doubling from the summer. We have also just had our insurance renewal come in at \$5,600, which is due in December.

We have undertaken to continue our take-out meal program and anticipate that we can cover about half of our expenses. To survive this pandemic, we have increased our online presence to keep our members informed and together, but getting through this winter will be really tough. We have applied to the \$20 million program for help with just our insurance bill.

The sad thing is that we are closed, funds are limited to keeping us operating, and as such, our ability to deliver the programs that our veterans and seniors need is strained. Also, our commitment to the future of Canada through our local air cadet squadrons is on hold.

Forty-five years ago, I was an air cadet in Oshawa who was supported by the 420 Wing. Air cadets taught me leadership and citizenship that have served me well in life. Not a day goes by that I don't use lessons learned in a program supported by the 420 Wing.

What we are asking for now is not a handout, but rather a helping hand to help keep us open through this unanticipated pandemic. For over 72 years, our club and members have given freely of our time, efforts and funds and to be able to continue in the future, we need help now to get us through the next short period.

Thank you.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir, and you came in well under the five minutes, which I appreciate that very much.

Next appearing is an individual, Mr. Max Gaboriault.

The next five minutes is yours, sir.

Mr. Max Gaboriault (As an Individual): I'm not as eloquent as the previous speaker, so bear with me. I have brain damage and, at the moment, severe anxiety.

I am Master Corporal Gaboriault, retired signal operator. I served in the army for 13 years. I was part of the first rotation into Afghanistan for nine months. I was an operator under General Fraser. I'm also a first-generation electronic countermeasures driver—jamming bombs—and I was a C9 gunner providing security.

In the last four years, I have been advocating on issues in regard to VAC and cognitive injuries and problems in policies that need to

be changed. It has yet to happen. As my health is degrading, it's getting harder and harder to pursue that vein.

As for my diagnosis, I suffer from mefloquine toxicity, with complex PTSD symptoms, and I'm borderline psychotic, meaning that I have been living for the last 15 years in survival mode, and I'm stuck in that situation.

COVID has been not too impactful on my daily living, as I don't really mingle well in society and go out a bare minimum. However, it has impacted my treatment, which has been going on for about a decade or so now. Because my body does not relax on its own, I rely on chiropractors, acupuncturists, physiotherapy and mental health counselling that has been moved to over the phone. We both know that this is not quite as impactful. My medication has not been affected as of yet, although there were some delays with the mail, but it's no big deal.

All in all, I'll just answer questions from the members. I think it's going to be easier that way, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Absolutely.

First of all, sir, thank you very much for your service, and thank you for joining us here today.

Up next is the Royal Canadian Air Force Association. We are joined by Linda Brimson, director, 427 London Wing.

London is my family home, so I know the London Wing quite well. I'm very pleased to see you here.

• (1545)

Ms. Linda Brimson (Director, 427 London Wing, Royal Canadian Air Force Association): Thanks so much. I'm just thrilled to have this time to talk about the wing.

We've got a great group, about 130 members, mostly seniors. We've got a heritage building that we think is just a gem. We mix innovation and tradition in our program, and continue to educate present and future generations on the importance of Canadian history, and honouring all that. We look forward to continuing our sponsorship and hosting of six air cadet squadrons as they study and work to achieve private pilot licences during a six-week summer stay.

Right now, we can't have the events that generate their funds through a 50-50 draw. We think that's an important contribution to the future of Canadian aviation. We supported the development of London Parkwood hospital's clinic post-traumatic stress disorder veterans support unit. Our volunteer members maintain close contact with veterans residing there.

This year two quilts of valour were presented to very deserving vets and we had two great group visits out there.

I'll tell you a little bit about our association and our building. It was formed in 1947. It occupies the original building on land now owned by London International Airport. It was built in 1939-1940 as an airmen's canteen. The wing building was part of Station Crumlin, site of No. 3 Elementary Flying School and No. 4 Air Observer School. This was all under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

The wing is believed to be the last representative and still usable building of its time in southwestern Ontario.

The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan was essential to Britain's survival during World War II. It was a project of incredible scope and expense. It was bigger than building Canada's national rail system. Sadly, this history has not been taught in Canadian schools. It falls to non-profit veteran groups and aviation organizations to share this important story.

Of the Canadians trained at BCATP bases all across Canada, we had pilots, navigators, air bombers, wireless operators, air gunners, and flight engineers. Also essential were the ground crew and the technical trainees for instrument and aircraft repair. This was a most critical Canadian contribution to the Allied war effort. Canada's 151 BCATP schools and bases Canada-wide provided safety from enemy bombing for U.K. air crew and ground force training, and quickly mobilized an incredible force of civilian and military personnel.

Post war, the wing building remained in use throughout the Korean and NATO eras until purchased by 427 Wing in 1959. I'll quote our wing director and Canadian Forces veteran Chuck Hardy, who stated:

We are so very proud that we have created a space for many Air Force veterans, their loved ones and people from the general community to come together and socialize among such incredible local and national historical artifacts.

Chuck continued:

We have been working really hard to find financial supports or alternatives to save our organization since COVID-19 forced us to shut our doors. Our members and volunteers are especially vulnerable due to age and health challenges. We have applied for government programs, grants and local initiatives. Sadly, we may be forced to declare bankruptcy. Wing members and friends of the Wing have donated generously, but we are missing all revenue from events that also include the wider community. Ongoing expenses for building maintenance, utilities and insurance continue with no event income to pay those bills.

We have done two appeals. The second one was better in reaching a wider public. We've received funds through GoFundMe and CanadaHelps. The CanadaHelps money is constrained. We can't use that for operating expenses.

- (1550)

We have submitted an application for the period from December 2020 to June 2021 for these categories: wages and benefits—we have one paid employee, our wing manager; professional fees needed for an auditor, an archivist and an assistant for museum programming; our insurance, which is very heavily invoiced at \$17,281.32 annually—you can believe we are shopping around; utilities, which continue to be high; our rent to the site holder; building upkeep—we need a replacement fire alarm panel and

placement lighting; materials and supplies; PPE; disposable, take-away food supplies; printing and communication for our education program; updating displays; new signage; and administrative costs.

In a happier, healthier future, the wing will once again host gatherings when people can safely come together.

Thank you for your time, attention and consideration.

The Chair: Thank you very much for being here with us today.

Now from the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada, we're joined by Deanna Fimrite, dominion secretary-treasurer, Dominion Command.

Thank you very much. The floor is yours.

Ms. Deanna Fimrite (Dominion Secretary-Treasurer, Dominion Command, Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for having me here today. We certainly appreciate the committee's concerns about the financial health of veterans associations.

I'd like to give a quick background for those members who may not have an ANAVETS or an ANAF unit, as they are sometimes known in their ridings.

The Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada, or ANAVETS for short, is the oldest veterans association in Canada. Our history can be traced back to 1840, and we were formally incorporated under a special act of Parliament in September 1917. Today, there are approximately 13,000 members in 61 units spread across eight provinces in the country.

The effects of COVID-19 have been particularly difficult for ANAVETS and many other veterans associations. Not only did the initial shutdowns lead to complete loss of revenue in the first few months of the pandemic, but the subsequent restrictions, once the associations could reopen, vastly restricted the main sources of revenue our units rely on.

In our original report to Veterans Affairs in early June, we estimated that about a quarter of our units had minimal concerns regarding continued operations. Half had moderate concerns, and another quarter had serious concerns. By the beginning of September, the situation was worsening and Dominion Command returned over \$43,000 in membership dues to units in need. Additionally, many provincial commands assisted their units financially where they could, either by foregoing portions of membership dues or loaning or gifting their reserve funds to units to help pay for operational costs.

Federal government support programs were initially of little help to many of our units, with approximately 40% being ineligible for the Canada emergency business account, due to their being volunteer-run operations that did not meet the payroll requirements of the program. The emergency community support fund looked promising, but it was only applicable to new or ongoing projects and not operational expenses, and not-for-profits were not eligible for regional development funding.

Most units laid off staff when they closed, with only a handful keeping on one staff member. As units reopened, we encouraged them to utilize the Canada emergency wage subsidy, but many have not rehired full staff due to decreased operating hours and revenues.

In most ANAVETS units, revenues fall into two broad categories. The first is hall rental and catering. This year our units had to cancel most of their hall rentals due to their closure, and then the capacity and social distancing restrictions. The wedding season was a complete loss for the year, as were smaller celebrations and corporate events. Even now there is uncertainty as to when this capacity will once again be allowed. The rentals in the past were often accompanied by large catering contracts and bar sales, all of which have literally disappeared.

The second main revenue source of our units comes from gaming and sports leagues. Bingos, meat draws, video lottery terminals and other provincial lottery proceeds are not only a major source of funds to our units, but they are also the basis of the community support provided by our units to other veterans and local charities and programs. These too were affected by closures and restrictions, with their capacities decreased by at least half.

Our units are also popular facilities for sports leagues, like darts, shuffleboard and billiards. Again, restrictions have drastically reduced these leagues and their participants. In many cases these main revenue sources can make up between 65% and 80% of a unit's overall revenue in a year, with entertainment, special events, lounge sales and membership dues rounding out the rest, all of which have been negatively affected. Those losses have short-, mid- and long-term consequences.

The initial closures forced units to burn through reserve funds to continue to pay operating expenses. Then they needed to adjust operations to ensure that they had all the required protocols to reopen, such as enhanced cleaning, distance markers, physical barriers, staff and volunteer safety equipment and sanitizing stations throughout the buildings. As mentioned before, most could not afford to reopen with the same operating hours with the enhanced restrictions curtailing their revenue-generating operations.

In addition to decreased revenues, our association has also been hurt by a dramatic reduction in our volunteers. A large majority of our volunteer base comes from the retired seniors demographic, which unfortunately is a higher risk category for COVID-19 severity.

To add salt to the wound, some operating expenses have exponentially increased. Liability insurance is increasingly difficult to even source, and is coming in at thousands of dollars over last year's costs, which adds additional financial pressures to all of our units.

The realities of the second wave are upon us now, with units in Sherbrooke, Quebec, the greater Toronto area and the province of Manitoba all being hit with secondary mandatory closures.

● (1555)

That is why the association is so grateful for the Government of Canada's recent \$1-million grant from the veterans organizations emergency support fund to the association to assist with the operating expenses of our units across the country. This funding will be a lifeline to many units to be able to keep the doors open and the lights on, and to continue to provide veterans and their members the social support and camaraderie that are so vital to mental health.

Although we cannot predict how much longer this pandemic may last, or the long-term impact on all of our units, we do know that without this funding many of them would most certainly have struggled to maintain our long history of serving veterans, their families and our communities.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of President Burke and all of our members, I appreciate the dedication and effort of this committee to understand our current situation and to ensure that we can continue to give our veterans and their families a place to come together again, when it's safe to do so, and help provide the best possible service and care that they so justly deserve.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Up next, from True Patriot Love Foundation, we have Mr. Nick Booth, chief executive officer.

You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Nick Booth (Chief Executive Officer, True Patriot Love Foundation): Thank you, sir, and thank you to the honourable members for inviting me to address you today.

For context, True Patriot Love is Canada's leading national foundation supporting its military. We exist to help members of the Canadian Armed Forces, veterans and their families by raising awareness of the challenges arising from service and funding much needed programs in local communities across the country.

We work closely with the Department of National Defence, Veterans Affairs Canada and the Canadian Armed Forces leadership, and our mandate is to deliver significant impacts across four key areas of focus: building stronger military families and, in particular, assisting the children and spouses of those who serve; supporting the physical and mental well-being of military members and veterans; enabling the rehabilitation and recovery of our wounded; and, connecting veterans back into communities following their transition.

We've have been in operation since 2009 and have distributed over \$30 million in funding across every province and impacted more than 33,000 lives, in particular in assisting those more recent veterans who served in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Rwanda and other conflicts.

We also campaign on behalf of Canada's veterans and their families, advocating for their health and well-being, shedding light on the impacts of service and funding important research into the needs and realities of the military community.

As with many charitable organizations, the global health crisis has presented us with an unprecedented challenge.

Since the start of the pandemic, our operations have been under significant stress due to an increased demand for our help, in parallel with cancelled events and reduced donor income. By the end of quarter one, we were facing a drop in revenue of 79% and, overall, our year-on-year income has fallen by more than half.

In response, under the direction of our board, we initiated an emergency response plan. We stopped all recruitment and froze vacant posts, reducing our staffing by a third, and held all other variable costs. Despite this, we've been forced to dip below a five-month operating reserve, which was established as a minimum safety level by the board. As at the end of October, the organization stood at 4.3 months' forward reserve, representing a position of considerable vulnerability.

As we look to the first half of 2021, with the continued restrictions on events, declining donations and economic uncertainty, we anticipate True Patriot Love will continue to show a revenue decline of at least 50% due to the pandemic, leaving us with a projected operational shortfall of \$2.9 million over the period.

As an organization that exists to serve the health and well-being of the military community, these financial challenges inevitably have a direct impact on our work with Canada's veterans and the funds we have available to grant to vital community programs across the country.

As a result, we are most grateful to the veterans organizations emergency support fund grant, which has provided significant help towards the foundation's operational costs. Without it, we would have been forced to lay off or furlough staff and restrict grants,

severely limiting our capacity to provide the veteran community with the support they need now more than ever.

We know from our outreach that veterans are struggling amidst the pandemic. Programs they have relied on for support have been cancelled, and social and geographic isolation has become a greater concern. The pandemic and the restrictions it has brought have magnified pre-existing mental and physical health conditions for those already struggling.

True Patriot Love is doing what it can to serve this community. Despite our significant financial setbacks, we have stepped up to provide funding in a number of vital initiatives over the course of the pandemic period.

We expedited our Bell TPL fund mental health grants for those struggling with psychological challenges, especially during this period of social isolation.

We funded online mental health services that will connect rural communities in eastern Quebec with the Valcartier Military Family Resource Centre. This is particularly critical at a time when military families may face geographic isolation or are unable to receive face-to-face support.

We supported Team Rubicon Canada as they adapted their programming to meet urgent community needs in the crisis, despite public health restrictions.

Funding was given to Camp Maple Leaf to develop a free Camp @ Home program for children from military families unable to enjoy this year's camp in person.

We sponsored the CIMVHR symposium on moral injury, a topic that has implications for both veterans and front-line health care workers.

As well, in partnership with the Vanier Institute of the Family, we are conducting the only national survey specifically aimed at understanding how the pandemic is impacting Canada's veterans and their families.

- (1600)

True Patriot Love's key position in the sector is to provide a strong and independent role, working with government, including Veterans Affairs Canada, to ensure the voice of our beneficiaries and program partners is heard and to direct funds and policy to areas of greatest need.

If not for the veterans organizations emergency support fund grant, our long-term viability would be uncertain, leaving a significant gap in support for the brave individuals who have served, and continue to serve, in Canada's uniform.

Thank you once again for the grant and the opportunity to speak with you today.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Booth.

Thank you to all the witnesses. None of you required me to interrupt you at any point for going over time, which I really appreciate.

We are going to jump into our first round of questions. This is our six-minute round.

Up first, we have MP Carrie, for six minutes.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank all the witnesses for being here today. This is such an important study.

Welcome, Mike Gimblett, from 420 Wing.

Mike, if you see, I'm wearing the 420 Wing tie, and I'm very proud of Oshawa and our community and all the work you do.

On Remembrance Day, I remember talking to some veterans who were very appreciative of the \$20 million for veterans organizations, but at the time, many people thought it was just for the Legions. Now we see that there is some \$6 million for the service clubs.

Again, a member mentioned to me billions of dollars in fraudulent CERB payments being given out, and that the amount going to veterans organizations is really not even a rounding error in comparison with those amounts. Therefore, there was some frustration there.

These clubs are starting to close and many of them are in crisis. It has been about eight months since the start of the pandemic. Do you think more clubs could have been saved if the money was sent out earlier?

Mr. Mike Gimblett: Most definitely, clubs would not be closing or in dire financial need if funds had been able to be accessed earlier. We did look into various programs ourselves, and because of our heavy volunteer presence, we couldn't meet the payroll requirements for the CEBA or anything such as that. It wasn't really our intention to have to take on debt, but we would be willing to do it to get through this crisis.

It's impossible for anybody to have realized last fall that we'd be in the situation that we're in now. As such, in the fall, we have to look at our balance and we're only allowed to carry over enough funds as a not-for-profit to see us through to get started in the new year. Obviously, we doled out a lot of money to different groups in October, November and December to make sure that we met the requirements of the not-for-profit act.

• (1605)

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mike, maybe you could explain to committee members what effect it would have locally if you actually closed. You mentioned how important it is. You are caretakers of that heritage building, in my understanding, and volunteers. You support the cadets, as well as local charities.

What's unique about your clubs and the service you provide and supply for veterans?

Mr. Mike Gimblett: We provide support. As 427 Wing and other wings and Legions, we are an extension of our veterans' and seniors' families.

We're finding now, with our seniors and veterans, their children who are out in the community and in the workforce are fearful of being around their parents, so they're Skyping, making phone calls and doing everything like that with their parents, but their parents are missing out on that actual human-to-human physical contact, sitting across the table, having a laugh and forgetting the situation we're in.

It's very important to everybody's mental well-being to be around other people. We have some members right now who are very fragile. We have them on a call list. We have people calling them, checking on them, doing wellness checks on them.

Being shut down again, as we are now, is giving them a taste of what would happen if clubs such as ours would close.

Mr. Colin Carrie: If that ever happened, it would be extremely unfortunate for Canada.

One of the things I want to point out today—and maybe you can point this out to members of the committee and people who are watching today—is how cost-effective you veterans clubs actually are. You supply all these services and benefits to the community, but in a normal year your clubs are different from the Legions, which are actually separate entities. Do you receive any federal funds, or do you receive any support from the federal government routinely?

Mr. Mike Gimblett: No. We are completely self-sufficient. As Linda said, we have membership dues; we have hall rentals and we do joint fundraising efforts in support of a local DND-accredited museum. It's the Royal Ontario Regiment Museum. They like to say that we provide them with air support for their events and rentals.

All the funds that we have come from us. We have no source other than our ability to raise funds and to go out there and hustle to bank a buck.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Regarding the application form, my understanding is that it was just last Wednesday that you guys found out about how to even apply for these funds. The process wasn't clear. You may have to wait until December. Is that something that puts some clubs at risk?

The Chair: Please give a very quick answer.

Mr. Mike Gimblett: Yes, it is, because we have an insurance bill coming due, and I don't know where we are going to get the money.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Mike Gimblett: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We now go to MP Casey for six minutes.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here and for the work you do.

I'd like to start with ANAVETS.

Ms. Fimrite, I think it follows on the evidence we just heard from Mr. Gimblett. Can you tell us a little bit about your structure? We heard from the Legions in the last meeting. They also have a Dominion Command, provincial commands and individual chapters.

Yet we heard testimony from two groups today who are completely independent. I understand that you're a service organization with multiple levels and a long history. I'm interested in the fact that there are independents as well. Can you talk a bit about that?

• (1610)

Ms. Deanna Fimrite: Sure.

The Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada is really structured in exactly the same way as the Royal Canadian Legion. We have a national Dominion Command; then in the provinces we have provincial commands, and then locally we have units. Although everybody is independent, the members are part of their local units; those local units are under the jurisdiction of the provincial command, and everybody is under the jurisdiction of the Dominion Command. We all do relatively separate things though.

There are local supports for veterans and members within the units. Provincial commands deal more with provincial governments. Then at the federal level, the majority of my work is working with Veterans Affairs and advocating for better services and benefits.

Mr. Sean Casey: Here's what I would like to understand. We heard from Ms. Brimson and Mr. Gimblett, both of whom have heritage buildings they're trying to maintain and both of whom have been negatively impacted, and yet they're independent. Are they able to make a pitch to you for some of that \$1 million that was sent to you by the federal government in the most recent legislation, or does their independence preclude them from accessing that?

Ms. Deanna Fimrite: My understanding of the program is that they would apply directly to the veterans organizations emergency support fund for funding for themselves. Associations like the Royal Canadian Legion and ANAVETS applied for all of our units, whereas other individual units of other organizations could apply for themselves, and they have held back money to assist those organizations as well.

Mr. Sean Casey: In your testimony you indicated that about 25% of your member chapters were significantly adversely affected. Is that \$1 million going to help them?

Ms. Deanna Fimrite: All of the money we receive from the government will go to help our local units. There won't be any money kept at the Dominion level at all.

Certainly my testimony was that in June, about a quarter of our units had some serious concerns about how they would pay their bills. In September that seemed to have gotten a lot worse, and now we're in November and more and more of our units are facing clo-

tures. Certainly, I believe the need is going to be there from our units to utilize all of this money to help them keep their doors open.

Mr. Sean Casey: You indicated that 40% of your units were not eligible for the Canada emergency business account. Can I take it from that, that 60% were eligible?

Ms. Deanna Fimrite: Yes, I would probably agree with that. I know that some units were eligible and did not apply, but certainly a number of our units have definitely received that funding and have used it to help keep their doors open and their programs running.

Mr. Sean Casey: Ms. Brimson, I noticed on your website that one of your major partners is the new horizons for seniors program. Can you tell us a bit about the relationship between your wing and that seniors program?

• (1615)

Ms. Linda Brimson: Yes. In the past, over some years, we have received grant money from new horizons, but nothing recently.

We had to pay over \$20,000 for a new roof. We weren't successful getting any grants for that. We have written grant proposals because we need a vertical lift within our building so that people can come from another part of it to access washrooms and refreshment areas. So yes, we'll use and we continue to source any grants.

There is a Royal Air Force Association national trust. We are affiliated with them, but the money goes one way. We contribute to them. Anybody wishing to get a tax receipt has to go through them or the Health Canada site and the—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry I have to interrupt.

We're way over the time. Hopefully we'll be able to come back to you so you can finish your thought.

MP Desilets, you have six minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Hello, everyone.

Mr. Gaboriault, I thank you for your years of service in the Canadian Forces, and I salute your courage. Thank you for appearing before us. What you said earlier touched me very much.

Since you did not have time to complete your testimony, I would like you to tell us more about your experience with the release process.

Did you get any training at the end of your service? How did it go in your case?

Did it meet your expectations?

Mr. Max Gaboriault: Yes. I went back to school.

It's really been a long time since I spoke French.

[English]

Bear with me.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: You can speak in English. Your words are interpreted automatically. Please feel comfortable.

Mr. Max Gaboriault: It's not a problem.

I went back to university, and I obtained a road construction and heavy vehicle driver's certificate.

I also obtained my Class 1 licence, since I had worked with heavy machinery throughout my career. I discussed it with my wife and we determined that it was probably a good choice. It wasn't. I tried to work in civil society, but it didn't work out. My social reintegration was a total failure. Eventually it was recognized that I had a diminished earning capacity, or DEC, I think—the names change every month. I'm staying at home now. It was an appropriate choice.

Mr. Luc Desilets: When you left the military, was there a three-day training session, for example, to prepare you and direct you to available services and programs?

Mr. Max Gaboriault: Yes. It was a long time ago, so I almost didn't remember. There was a seminar offered by the Second Career Assistance Network (SCAN) program.

Honestly, the process of leaving the Canadian Forces rests on the shoulders of the individual, who often suffers from after-effects. In my case, it was my brain that was damaged, and I didn't know it. I had only had a mental assessment. Obviously, from that perspective, it was a total failure in terms of social reintegration.

The task of determining what we're going to do after our military career rests solely on our shoulders. I spent 30% of my life in the military. When I came out, I didn't fit into society at all. I'm sorry, I forgot what I was talking about.

• (1620)

Mr. Luc Desilets: This answers my question and confirms some of the testimonials that are circulating.

I've never been in the military and I don't know your background, but what I do understand, from what you and other veterans have said, is that your release from the forces is not necessarily the best time in your life to learn or acquire knowledge related to what is ahead of you.

Am I mistaken?

Mr. Max Gaboriault: No.

I'd just like to clarify something. I had to find a doctor myself and learn how the entire health care system works. What helped was that when my wife became pregnant while I was stationed in Edmonton, it was a crash course in the civilian health care system for me. The military system is completely different. It's much more efficient. I was very surprised to see how it worked in civilian society, if only to go to a doctor.

I hope I've answered your question.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Yes, perfectly.

You were in the army for 13 years, if I understood correctly.

How long has it been since you left?

Mr. Max Gaboriault: I left the forces in July 2014.

Mr. Luc Desilets: In your case, do you feel that you are receiving all the services needed for your health condition?

[English]

The Chair: You have thirty seconds, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Max Gaboriault: No, but I'll probably talk about that when I answer the next questions.

[English]

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: We can't hear, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Max Gaboriault: Mr. Chair, the audio is working well for me.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry?

Mr. Max Gaboriault: My sound is just fine, at my end.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Chair, if I may, I would like Mr. Gaboriault to repeat his answer, because we did not hear it. I don't know if I'm the only one who hasn't heard it.

[English]

The Chair: Certainly.

I think he asked for your last answer again, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Max Gaboriault: I really don't know.

[English]

The Chair: It was just your last answer.

Go ahead.

Mr. Max Gaboriault: I have no idea what the question was. I'm sorry, I have no short-term memory.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: No problem.

I was just asking you if, since your release from the forces six years ago, you have obtained the services you feel you need. Are the programs meeting your needs?

Mr. Max Gaboriault: Yes and no.

I will be able to talk about it in more detail when I answer the next questions.

[English]

The Chair: Just in time for her round, we have MP Blaney.

You're up next for six minutes, if you're ready to go.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): I'm always ready to go, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Of course; my apologies.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): If Lindsay's still here—I'm trying to look quickly on this screen—I'm going to let her do the first six minutes.

The Chair: Fantastic.

Go ahead.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): I'm sorry, I never want to cut off Ms. Blaney; however, I have some questions that I want to ask Ms. Brimson.

I'm so glad to see you here today, Linda.

I'm a proud member of Parliament for the area that represents 427 Wing. I'm also a proud member.... I don't have my tie, like Mr. Carrie; I have a pin, however.

Many of my questions are very similar, but specifically for the 427 Wing.

In your testimony you talked about the importance of the history that the 427 Wing brings to London, but also the surrounding southwestern Ontario region. There are incredible benefits just within the canteen itself and in the history of the canteen.

You didn't have a chance to mention Spooner Memorial Gardens, the Spirit of Flight Aviation Museum or the Secrets of Radar Museum, which I know are also key parts of the wing.

I'm so grateful that it's in the community. I'm also grateful for the community's recognizing its value and coming together for a temporary fix. However, the money that was received from the publicity ads that we were able to get out in the news media is temporary. You spoke about the wing permanently closing if you don't get continual funding.

Could you talk about the services that would be lost in addition to what you've already mentioned? Hopefully you can talk about the impact on the members, many of whom, of course, are seniors, and the emotional, social and mental isolation this has caused and the problems it has caused for your members.

Going forward, you also talked about the operational costs versus the project-based funding with which you've had to try to make ends meet. How important is it for the government, in some of the upcoming funding, to consider operational funding and costs as you go forward?

• (1625)

Ms. Linda Brimson: It would be key if funds could be allocated without the restrictions. I think we'll be able to access some of our programming money through public donations, which will probably be pretty good for the next six to nine months. However, the operational costs are killing us. They're \$17,000 plus. The insurance bill is huge. During COVID we're proud that we have paid off a \$10,000 roofing bill, but some of that was because members and executive members kicked in money themselves. We did not want to stiff a local contractor who had done a good roof in good faith. It comes down to that we're part of the community.

We're proud to be part of an aviation hub. We have the Jet Aircraft Museum. We have the International Test Pilot School. We have Fanshawe College Norton Wolf School of Aviation Technology. There's such a great aviation resource right around us within walking distance, for instance Diamond Aircraft. We realize there's something there to build on, but it's hard to be doing those five-year plans when we have fires to put out. Five senior men and I have met every week putting out crises and deciding where we could juggle, how could we meet our commitments to be a community member.

We have people who have kept in contact with our members. Sadly, we're losing members to dementia, to poor health. Many have spouses in care. That's a big concern right now. We continue our Parkwood links, as I mentioned. We have Hilda, who's great with our contacts there, getting veterans some smaller things they might need. That continues. But all of the social aspects, the Friday lunches that brought in all kinds of previous pilots, all kinds of veterans, not just air force.... We don't want to have in-person eating right now; they're too vulnerable. With winter weather, it's just going to be harder for everybody to get there.

We continue sourcing grants, but again, some of those have strings and our national air force association—the one that has the charitable donation, the charitable registration.... I think some other non-profits have found themselves in that catch-22. We are a non-profit. We generate funds from events, but we're certainly not taking in a great amount of funds.

• (1630)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Yes.

Ms. Linda Brimson: We may look at business sponsorships.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I wanted to quickly add, and I know that Mr. Carrie has mentioned it, that you approached me as your member of Parliament in April, and we wrote a letter to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of Canadian Heritage asking for help to save the 427 Wing. Unfortunately, we never received a response from Veterans Affairs. We just received a response from Heritage. Unfortunately, it was noted that it was far too late to apply for the programs that had been made available. But I'm concerned, too, by the fact that I believe that the government waited specifically until the day before Remembrance Day to announce funding that could have been used way before that.

Could you talk about the impacts of that and how you had to struggle for those eight or so months?

The Chair: I'm really sorry, but we're actually well over time right now. I'm going to have to move on.

We're actually into the second round.

First up for five minutes we have MP Wagantall, please.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to all of you for being here today. The roles that you play are crucial and I feel it's really unfortunate that the government took so long to respond to what would clearly be a visible need. Our veterans are in circumstances where they're facing huge backlogs, and I want to comment on Max's scenario.

You indicated, Max, that you're suffering from mefloquine toxicity, PTSD, borderline psychotic injuries—

Mr. Max Gaboriault: I suffer from generalized anxiety disorder as well. I forgot that one.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Okay, there you go. These are things that you say are keeping you just in survival mode. I appreciate that you said that COVID hasn't impacted you on the isolation side. That's something that our veterans—

Mr. Max Gaboriault: It does and it doesn't. The way it doesn't is that I lived in a war zone, in prison essentially, the base, for nine months, and all my movements were controlled. It's just part of life in the army. In that sense, no, it doesn't. Where it does is when it impacts my treatment.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: That's where I wanted to go, because our Saskatchewan Legion's director who came and talked about his service officers said that... I mean, your funding is important, but the first thing they go for is that treatment. You have to have your treatments. You talked about physio and that your body doesn't relax on its own. How has COVID impacted your ability to get those treatments?

Mr. Max Gaboriault: If we go with the first lockdown, I was unable to access treatments, other than my psychologist because the sessions moved to being over the phone, which isn't great, by the way, but it's better than nothing. I couldn't go to the chiropractor. I couldn't go to see my acupuncturist. Those are very specific-purpose treatments. I don't remember the last time I went to physiotherapy, and when they reopen, I'm required to wear a mask.

I'm working out, as low intensity as it might be. I don't breathe like you do. My brain controls differently, so having said that, I abstain from going to get treatment to reinforce my shoulders, which I injured in the past. That's how it really impacted me, because my body gets tighter and tighter, and I rely more and more on medication to try to relax. Obviously I'm also using a lot of holistic techniques that are not part of my traditional treatment.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: You're doing what you can, Max. I just want to bring up the fact that you're not getting out to those treatments, and it's impacting your health. You look good, you know what I mean? Yet really, you're very limited in many ways.

Mr. Max Gaboriault: That's my problem; I look good, but many guys like me look good.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: I know it impacts you personally, plus your wife and your family. You say you're home right now. What is your wife's role in the midst of this?

• (1635)

Mr. Max Gaboriault: My wife is my caregiver. She has been my caregiver ever since I met her, to be honest, because I got diagnosed in 2010 and I met my wife in 2008. I got diagnosed in Co-

mox when I got posted there. I was shelved because I was damaged goods for the army. That's the ugly truth.

COVID has impacted me in the sense that it affects my behaviour in certain ways.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Your wife plays a role in that.

Mr. Max Gaboriault: Yes, I've been advocating for four years.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Your wife plays a role in your care for what?

Mr. Max Gaboriault: Because I have no memory.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: What are you advocating for? What are you advocating for your wife?

Mr. Max Gaboriault: The caregiver allowance, because it is discriminatory against guys like me who have cognitive injuries.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Because you look like you're well, you can dress yourself and do basic care, but it really requires her intervention for you to be able to function.

Mr. Max Gaboriault: Essentially, just to save time for other members who might wonder, I can feed myself, dress myself and bathe myself, which are the base criteria for the caregiver allowance. However, I've been denied three times, I think, so far, maybe four. I can't remember anymore. The fact is that my wife has to remind me to eat. I haven't had breakfast. I realized that when I sat down in front of the camera. I totally forgot; I had other things on my mind. My living situation can be dicey from day to day. I can't necessarily focus on an essential task that I need to do. My wife reminds me to get dressed, to eat and to bathe.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you so much, Max.

Thank you for your patience, Chair. I appreciate it.

The Chair: It's not a problem.

Up next we have MP Amos for five minutes, please.

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Gaboriault, thank you for your testimony and I salute your courage. We are very grateful to you for appearing before us.

There is no doubt that it is important for Canadians to understand the challenges you face. I think it's important that you're here today. Congratulations.

[English]

I have questions that I would like to direct to the organizations that are here today, because I want to try, for the sake of enabling the evidentiary record of this study, to take a look both backward and forward and just get a broader sense, in the context of the support that's being provided in COVID times, of what the financial trajectories of your organizations are, setting aside COVID.

I wonder if each of the organizations could give us a sense here of what kind of revenue trajectories your organizations have been on in the past 10 years or so. Are they stable? The same? Have they gone down over the past 10 years or have they gone up and, if so, by what kind of percentage? I'm looking for really short answers here because I have more follow-ups based on that information.

Thank you to each of you.

Perhaps we can start with Mrs. Brimson.

Ms. Linda Brimson: The 427 Wing, I would say, has had decreasing membership among veterans. We are trying to get younger membership and a more diverse base.

There have been some years that were more successful than others. We've had a pretty good analysis done through switching to QuickBooks in our accounting. It says that we need to do two or three larger events that make money. We can't always depend on raffles and licences.

The other thing is that we're interested in this aviation hub, and we're interested in forming business partnerships and working with other aviation groups such as the Canadian Harvard Aircraft Association. We have similar members in both.

• (1640)

Mr. William Amos: Thank you, Mrs. Brimson. From that, I'm taking that there is an overall decline in membership—

Ms. Linda Brimson: Yes.

Mr. William Amos: —and an overall decline in revenues, notwithstanding COVID.

Ms. Linda Brimson: Yes, and on rentals and whatnot, because our building is so unique it has an appeal as people step back in time, but we have had to offer a different type of event. We realize that you need to spin and innovate to maintain.

Mr. William Amos: Okay.

Perhaps we will go over to Mr. Gimblett.

Mr. Mike Gimblett: I've been the chair of our organization for the last two years. Before that, I was kind of on and off the executive but very active in the wing.

Ten years ago, our membership was probably 135 people. Right now, I think we're sitting at 115. We launched a very early and aggressive campaign to renew memberships this year, which came in very well. Quite a few members gave us donations in addition to their memberships. That definitely helped us.

All service clubs are faced with new challenges. The new generation just doesn't want to commit to anything. I can't even get my kids to tell me if they're coming for supper until they know that they don't have a better offer.

That being said, through our community outreach and our fundraising efforts, we're making efforts to involve the community, to get them in. In terms of our building there, we are part of No. 20 Elementary Air Training School of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. We inhabit building No. 10 from it.

I also recognize the historical significance of our building, and therefore we've been a driving force behind the historical conservation district encompassing the three remaining buildings and Air-men's Park.

In our fundraising efforts, we've gotten very aggressive over the last couple of years. I'd say our revenues probably increased about 7% or 8% from 2018 to 2019. Obviously this year, we're down 80%.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gimblett. I'm going to have to interrupt you there, I'm afraid.

Mr. Mike Gimblett: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: We'll come back, hopefully, in another question so you can finish your thoughts there.

Up next we have, for two and a half minutes, MP Desilets.

The floor is yours, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to ask you a few brief questions, Mr. Gimblett.

Can you summarize how your organization differs from a legion?

[English]

Mr. Mike Gimblett: We are completely independent. We're made up of air force veterans. We have about 20 members of the Royal Canadian Air Force Association. We do have Legion members who also have membership with us. We are a totally independent club building on the heritage. We were founded in 1948 by returning air force veterans, so we've just continued. Children of veterans have become members. We still have some remaining World War II veterans and veterans of past service in the Canadian Armed Forces.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Would you say that what you offer complements what the legions offer?

[English]

Mr. Mike Gimblett: People have membership with us and with the Legion. We have some of those people. We also have the Ontario regiment. Their officers' mess is closed and they've been told it will not reopen, so people who are members of the officers' mess have come to us now and have become members with us. We're a very inclusive club. We're open to everybody, and we want to maintain and preserve our heritage.

• (1645)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: You said earlier that there was no program that you could fit into to get grants, given the COVID-19 pandemic. Did I understand you correctly?

[English]

The Chair: Could we have a very brief answer, please?

Mr. Mike Gimblett: Because of our large number of volunteers, we did not meet the payroll requirements for the CEBA. None of the other programs we have looked at apply to us.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

MP Blaney, you have two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Brimson, I'm going to come back to you. Lindsay has asked me to follow up to make sure you get an opportunity to answer the question that she asked. Basically, how would 427 Wing benefit more effectively during this timeline if the resources had been available sooner?

Ms. Linda Brimson: Part of our mandate is to continue educating. We know that we have this social aspect, this gathering aspect, but we're going beyond that.

Lindsay referred to a museum display, to the Spirit of Flight Aviation Museum. We also have provided museum space to the Secrets of Radar Museum, the equipment and the experience they offer, which is unique across Canada.

There are a lot of doors-open type of events and touring events that haven't been able to happen. You need a bit of funding just to stimulate, whether it's school children, handouts, video or whether to shift some of those things online. All that audiovisual takes time.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: The next question is this: What resources do you need to survive during the second wave that is now just impacting us immensely?

Ms. Linda Brimson: We need a recognition that the organizations help heritage buildings survive and something to contribute to the upkeep of that—a recognition that that's a worthy endeavour.

You can imagine keeping up a 1939 building. When we meet there, we have the thermostat turned down. We're huddled in our coats, and we put on a warm drink. We want that building to endure. We want people to experience it beyond the veterans, but it is a monumental task.

We're reaching out to museum organizations. We're reaching out to heritage organizations. We're reaching out to the RCAF. Like I say, we're trying very hard to access funds and to collaborate with our local groups, and maybe even national groups, to make that experience and programming. It takes funds to have that expertise of an archivist.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

Ms. Linda Brimson: Thank you, Rachel.

The Chair: Thank you.

Up next, we have MP Seeback, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Gaboriault, I want to take a moment to talk to you a little bit about your experience of transitioning out of the forces. It sounds like you certainly have been having some issues.

I was reading a report in July 2016 from the veterans ombudsman. It talked about how, depending on the circumstances, a transitioning member can be required to print and complete 21 separate applications from the 186 forms on the Veterans Affairs website.

It was described by the veterans ombudsman as a bureaucratic nightmare. What was your experience like as you transitioned out due to medical conditions?

Mr. Max Gaboriault: I cannot speak of when I retired because I can't remember, but it is a bureaucratic nightmare for any aspect of dealing with VA, more so.... It's hard if you lose a leg, an arm, or any part of your body and then have to deal with that, but it's even harder when your injury is cognitive.

The one thing I can recall—because I have been dealing with VA since 2008 for various injuries—is that when you were denied in some aspect, you were informed verbally, and you could appeal verbally. Now—and I can't tell you as of when—it has changed. It has been burdened with written appeals.

I have one in the process for which I was informed that I need to go the second level of appeal, but that requires me to write that appeal, which is difficult for me. I've been trying to.... Various services or available programs are endless paperwork of my life story because departments don't talk to each other.

I don't qualify for the disability tax credit, but I'm close to 120% disabled. That's a ton of paperwork. I have been attempting to apply for CPP for five years now, but I keep forgetting because it's such a daunting task for me.

It's the same thing with VA. Every department makes life difficult when you're disabled. Nothing is streamlined, and everybody's trying to justify their job.

• (1650)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thanks for sharing that. We've heard that over and over again recently, and it's really a shame and a disservice to our veterans.

For the service clubs, we heard from the Royal Canadian Legion in their committee testimony on Tuesday that if the government had acted sooner and provided certainty with funds sooner, some Legion branches would likely not have closed.

Did you request funds earlier from the government, and what was the government's response, if any, to those requests for funds for your organizations?

Any one of you can go ahead.

Mr. Nick Booth: Certainly we have been in discussions with the government since the beginning of the pandemic, when it was clear that veterans organizations and community programs across the country were going to struggle. As we've heard from Mr. Gaboriault, the veterans themselves were missing out on their programming and support.

We made our first approach for a \$20-million contribution from the federal government as far as March, and have been in continuous dialogue with Veterans Affairs, the Prime Minister's Office and Treasury Board over the last nine to ten months. I was certainly delighted when it eventually emerged in the Speech from the Throne, through the veterans organizations emergency support fund. But it did take quite a long time to work that process through. Obviously, fully understanding that there are many other claims for federal relief during the pandemic, it certainly took much longer than what would have been ideal. I think, to get that support, which we first called for back in mid-March.

The Chair: You have a few seconds left, sir.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Are there any other organizations that want to quickly chime in?

The Chair: Give a very brief answer, please.

Mr. Mike Gimblett: As I said, we explored all options. The CE-BA program was not available to us. Other grants and programs, most of them are for new programs. There is nothing for operating expenses. When you do take a grant for a new program, you have to make a commitment to keep it going for two, three, four or five years. If you don't have the—

The Chair: Thank you. Sorry, the time is up.

Now for five minutes, MP Fillmore, please.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks very much to all the witnesses for sharing their time and experiences with us today.

If I could, I want to say a special thank you to Master Corporal Gaboriault for being here today. Although, Max, my thank you to you feels small to me, but please know that it is profoundly sincere. Thanks for being with us today.

Ms. Brimson, I was very happy to hear you mention the Canadian Harvard Aircraft Association. My father flew Harvards at 15 Wing in Moose Jaw back in the fifties.

• (1655)

Ms. Linda Brimson: Oh, good.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: There are a few photographs around the house, and lots of stories. So thank you for bringing that back to mind. I do appreciate it.

I have the great honour of representing Halifax in the House of Commons. As we have a significant presence of all three branches here, it wouldn't come as a surprise to any of you that the serving population and the veteran community form an everyday component of our experience here in the city. It's just part of who we are here. I am deeply plugged into the challenges that are being faced. Aside from having three Legions in this district, there are two service organizations. Unit 373 is in Halifax, and we have our Royal

Canadian Naval Association, Peregrine, here as well. As you can see, we live this every day here.

One of the things that I have come to learn from all five of these organization—the three Legions and the two service organizations that I visit regularly—is that the financial challenges didn't just crop up because of COVID. Sure, we could talk about how quickly COVID-related funds were released, but this is really a longer-term decline. The ability of organizations to draw in new members, to build membership and maintain members, and to continue to have the cash flow to offer the programs that are so important to veterans, all of these things have been getting more difficult over time.

As they should, the organizations are turning primarily to the federal government. In fact, you will know that it's been widely reported that about \$95 of every \$100 of COVID-related relief in Canada has flowed from the federal government, and there's nothing wrong with that.

I was encouraged, Ms. Brimson, when you were talking about some of the other things you're looking at, and that's really where I hope to go when hearing from the witnesses today. We're all talking about pivoting and finding new sources of revenues to adapt to COVID. I'm wondering, Ms. Brimson, if you or any of the other organizations could go a little further in discussing the efforts you have made to find other sources of income, other programs that could be helpful to meeting the tremendous need that we know exists. If anybody has anything to add here, I'd ask you to go ahead.

Ms. Linda Brimson: I can speak to that.

I think it's essential. If an organization can't grow and change, see new needs, respond to them and innovate.... We need to appeal to different generations. Our education programs have to be presented in different ways—with audiovisual equipment, different from just a speaker in a classroom.

Charley Fox, was a well-known and decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross and Bar. He was a member for 20 years at our wing. He never glorified war, but because he had lived experience, he could go into a school. Soon there won't be those members who had Second World War or flying experience. There will be some from Korea, NATO and the Cold War era, but it won't be the same.

Yes, in a way it will be survival of the fittest. The groups that don't innovate, that don't really.... We want to keep that social warmth, but we'd better be offering a very good service to the community and to the wider community; hence this idea of an aviation hub in London. Even our business neighbours are hurting through this COVID. It's a very tough time to be approaching a manufacturing aviation partner right now and saying, look, we're wondering how we can support each other. However, collaboration is a key thing that we will be doing.

Mr. Nick Booth: Can I make one extra point?

The Chair: You have about 10 seconds, sir.

Mr. Nick Booth: I think there is a missing connection between the wider Canadian public and veterans now. I think one of the key things we can all do, and maybe it's a sector-wide initiative, is to remind the Canadian public of the three-quarters of a million people who have served in Canada's uniform, and of the 101,000 still serving now. I don't think the public know that.

With regard to the serving members—who are obviously, sir, in your constituency particularly important—mobilizing the corporate sector to look at hiring transitioning veterans is one of the best ways to help their long-term financial well-being and mental health. It also will populate business with veterans, who will then be friendly later on.

• (1700)

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thank you, Mr. Booth.

The Chair: Just before we move on, I have to say that my ears perked up when I heard the name “Charley Fox”. He is my wife's great-uncle.

Ms. Linda Brimson: Oh!

The Chair: I'll have to let her know this evening that he was mentioned in committee. She'll get a kick out of that.

Ms. Linda Brimson: He is big with the wing and with CHAA.

The Chair: He is big, period.

Ms. Linda Brimson: Everywhere, yes.

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Max Gaboriault: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Before we move on to the third round, Mr. Gimblett has had his hand up—

Mr. Max Gaboriault: Hello?

The Chair: Oh, hello. Go ahead, Max.

Mr. Max Gaboriault: I have about 20 minutes before I have to pick up my kids from school. I am three hours earlier in the day, so unfortunately I have that constraint.

The Chair: Fair enough. We will enjoy your company until you have to leave and will completely understand when you do.

I just wanted to mention that Mr. Gimblett's hand was up in the participants section. I wasn't sure if he was having any technical issues or if there was a reason for that.

Mr. Mike Gimblett: I was just going to comment on how over the last three years we've become very innovative. We've sourced new sources of revenue. We've been growing our revenues and keeping our membership the same.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much for that.

We'll move now to the third round.

MP Brassard, you have five minutes.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to go back to the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada. When we had the Legion in the other day, Dominion Command, they were talking about the challenges. I think you touched on this being a mostly volunteer-based organization. One of the

other challenges that came up was the inability of the army, navy and air force vets to access government programs, because in some cases they had not filed the proper taxes, the T2s, which are for charitable taxes.

I'm just wondering, have you heard or experienced any of that across the country with some of the branches?

Ms. Deanna Fimrite: Yes. Certainly, very similar to the Royal Canadian Legion, our units are based on a charter that we provide them and we are incorporated federally. In some different provinces they may be part of their provincial societies or what have you. Really, when they ask, “What is your incorporation number?”, we have only one. That is the one that is owned by the Dominion Command.

There certainly have been struggles. I haven't heard of this particular T2 issue, but I have heard of other units that struggled when applying for the wage subsidy programs and just trying to get online. Even at my national office, trying to get on my CRA account is difficult for us. I certainly understand those issues.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you for that.

Mr. Booth, True Patriot Love is a tremendous organization doing tremendous work. We heard from VETS Canada the other day, about the gap from March until the funding was announced and the difficulties in that organization and their ability to provide services to their veterans. They talked about having to lay off staff members, and a general diminishment in their ability to provide services to veterans.

Can you speak of your experience with that and how the \$1.5 million that has been allocated to the TPL foundation will be utilized going forward?

Mr. Nick Booth: As many veterans organizations struggled in those first months, as I mentioned in my testimony, we were eligible to receive some benefit from the wage subsidy and the rent subsidy. I would certainly commend the government for making not-for-profit organizations able to apply for that. That allowed us to keep our staff on and not furlough and or make them redundant, which in turn not only helped the wider economy but also allowed us to continue our work. However as I mentioned, our revenue is already down 52% year on year.

To your question, the \$1.5 million will give us certainty during the coming months. We know in the veterans sector—I'm sure the other witnesses would agree—that the month of November is the one time of year when people really think about veterans. We typically get 40% of our money in about a five-week period. The \$1.5 million will hopefully allow us to get through the remaining months until the economic conditions improve.

As a point of clarification on something that came up much earlier in a question for Ms. Fimrite, the conditions around the VOESF grant do not allow onward granting. They're only for operational relief for your own organizations. Other organizations would not be allowed to bid for that money. It's to allow the recipients themselves to maintain their work during the coming months.

It would certainly allow us to keep our staff during the winter to make sure that we can push and hopefully maintain our work as we emerge.

● (1705)

Mr. John Brassard: If we continue down the same path of the pandemic and these programs and their associated monies were to stop, what impact would that have on your ability to function?

Mr. Nick Booth: Most certainly we would be faced with laying off staff and potentially not being able to pay our rent, which would put us in legal jeopardy with our landlord. We have a lease without break, so if we're unable to pay that, we would certainly be facing some form of very difficult conversations and/or litigation. The programs have given us the ability to navigate that. As I mentioned in my testimony, just before the start of November, we fell down to 4.2 months of forward operating reserve, which means that we wouldn't exist by Easter. Having been a ten-year organization, Canada's largest national foundation for the military, to go out of business by the spring would certainly be a significant consequence for the veterans we serve.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, everyone, for taking the time to be with us today.

The Chair: Thank you.

For five minutes, we have MP Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

First, I want to say thank you to all of you for taking time from your very busy lives and being with us for this very important study.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gaboriault, it was really a pleasure to meet you and listen to your story. Thank you for sharing it with us today. I know you're going to have to leave us to pick up your children, but I wanted to at least thank you for your years of service, sir.

Mr. Max Gaboriault: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I'm not sure if the committee knows, but I just want to note that today is the first day of Canada's 16 days of activism against gender-based violence.

With that in mind, I want to ask Mr. Booth—and I know you made some reference to some of the hardships you're encountering as a foundation—about the financial health of any of your programs

to help the military men and women who have been affected by sexual violence during their service.

Mr. Nick Booth: Thank you, Madam. It's a very good question.

We do actually maintain a dedicated fund for women veterans. It's called the Captain Nichola Goddard fund.

As members may know, Captain Goddard was the first woman killed in the Canadian Armed Forces, in Afghanistan. In her honour, we've worked with the Goddard family over the last two to three years to build a dedicated program for women, both veterans and those still serving.

We certainly do provide support for those who've suffered sexual violence whilst in the military, and we have funded some women-only mental health community programs through some of our partners. Through the Veterans Transition Network, for example, we funded very specific, dedicated women's programming.

If there are women, or indeed men, who suffered from sexual violence during their service, we would certainly be very keen to ensure that they receive the services. I think the 16 Days of Activism to make sure that what has remained a relatively taboo subject, despite the chief of the defence staff's commitment to raising it.... I think women are a priority for the Canadian Armed Forces, and I would commend them for that. However, through the Goddard fund, we're very committed to making sure that women, both those serving and veterans, receive all the help they can get as they move on from experiences they may have suffered.

● (1710)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much for that. I appreciate that reply.

Mr. Gimblett, I was very taken by the fact that 95% of your members are seniors. Before I entered politics I worked with seniors in a retirement home where I had the great privilege of meeting our veterans, men and women and also some spouses of our military.

I have a question, and it's just a clarification for me because I know you made reference to aspects of payroll not meeting certain criteria, and CEBA. In my view and my mind, they're two different programs.

CEBA, I understand, is a loan that you would need apply for through your financial institution. Is that what you were referring to?

Mr. Mike Gimblett: Yes, because our payroll is so low, we don't meet the minimum requirement.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: The requirement of \$20,000?

Mr. Mike Gimblett: Yes, because so much of our work is done by volunteers.

We do have an HST number. If we could access CEBA just through the fact that we have an HST number and are an actual business—

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Okay.

Mr. Mike Gimblett: And we report.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I know we're all talking about COVID right now. Based on what you just made reference to and the large volunteer-based approach, what's the plan for next year for you in terms of survival?

Mr. Mike Gimblett: We're going to continue with our... At the start of COVID, we came up with doing a take-out meal every two weeks. That serves our members, and we've also expanded out into the community. This weekend coming up we have 100 meals booked already.

We're hustling in any way we can, and there are very limited ways that we can raise funds right now. We can't have rentals. We can't have people at our mess hall. This is the only way we can do it. We've come up with new, innovative ways.

We carried our expenses through the summer, but now with the heating season, things are looking a lot more dire. A lot of our members have made some very significant donations to help us.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you for that.

The Chair: Next is MP Desilets, for two and a half minutes please.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: I have a quick question: if we could return to a nearly normal life on February 1, would your organizations be able to survive?

[English]

Mr. Mike Gimblett: We most definitely would, and we'd be in a position to support all of the groups and programs that we normally had, and probably even increase our revenues again over last year's.

Ms. Linda Brimson: As unpleasant as the hardships of COVID have been, I can't help but feel grateful that we have had to think harder, think smarter and realize where we could trim and where we need to expand. Yes, we would survive, but I think it has made us sharper on our focus and made us look at this, and say, okay, you put the fires out, but you need those one- and two-year plans. You need to partner with local and national groups.

Yes, we would survive, but I think we had to have a reckoning and a hard look at ourselves.

Ms. Deanna Fimrite: I agree. I think ANAVETS as an association will survive, but it does bring forward that bigger question that we were facing before COVID-19. We have to find a way to hand this association down to the next generation and ensure that it continues. We haven't done a great job on that thus far. Hopefully, COVID-19 will teach us some lessons on how we're better able to connect with the next generation of veterans to ensure that it does survive.

• (1715)

Mr. Nick Booth: I think the other point that may emerge from this is better collaboration in the sector. There are a lot of military charities, both large and small, and there may be ways in which the sector could begin to collaborate better, from just service delivery in local communities to avoid duplication right through to more challenging ideas like sharing premises or sharing purchasing.

There are various ways in which everyone can cut costs in their organizations without losing their brand identity or their relationships with their supporters. I think the old adage is "never waste a good crisis". I think people should be embracing this, challenging though it is, to explore new ways of communicating and new ways of collaborating, for which perhaps there was no mandate or burning platform for them to do beforehand.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Up next we have MP Blaney for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Max, I know you have to go and pick up your kids. It looks like it's a bit of a gray day and not a rainy day, so I guess that's good; I'm hearing snow.

I think you've outlined very clearly the challenges you're facing and how they impact your life and the life of your family. You've talked about applying several times for the caregiver allowance and the responsibility that your family—not just your wife, really, but your whole family—takes on in supporting you. We've talked about that. If you could put it officially on the record here, why is VAC saying no to you?

Mr. Max Gaboriault: Because, plain and simple, it's policy. I can feed myself, dress myself and bathe myself. For those reasons, I don't qualify for the disability tax credit either—it's the exact same reasons. It discriminates against cognitive injuries, meaning brain injuries, and this is my fourth year of advocating. I think I started about three years ago, and nothing whatsoever has changed.

COVID is just making things worse for me. I'm a psychotic patient. I have to try to remain calm at all times. I'm sedated to function in normal life. As an example, on my own, I found a treatment, but it's in Victoria. I have a driving service that can take me to it, but I have to wear a mask.

I can't wear a mask for a long time because all of you look like terrorists to me. I was wearing a scarf while on patrol doing my job. I'm not going to explain that further because it triggers me. This means that even if everything goes through, I won't be able to go and get the treatment I need because it triggers me, which could put the driver in jeopardy. I have to abstain from a lot of things because of it. I can wear it for a very short amount of time. Now, though, I think it's required everywhere in B.C., indoors and probably in other places, which makes it very difficult for me. On top of that, I'm hard of hearing, and I can't see anybody's face to read their lips so I could function better.

I don't know if I answered your question, because I'm getting lost in my head.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: You answered my question. Drive safely with your children, Max.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Up next we have MP Carrie for five minutes, please.

Perhaps you can lower your mike. We'll have a better chance of hearing you.

Mr. Colin Carrie: One of these days I'm going to get that right, Mr. Chair.

I want to dig in a little bit deeper into recommendations and what MPs and the government can do to help keep these veteran organizations viable and surviving past this pandemic. I think the services you provide are going to be needed even more in our community. I know that's the case in Oshawa for sure.

Mr. Gimblett, you suggested that perhaps if the programs were a little bit more flexible—you mentioned if the organization had an HST number, for example—that would allow organizations to get that necessary support to keep open over the winter months.

Do you or any of the witnesses have suggestions on what we could do to ensure that these organizations remain open? The more I hear about what you do, I realize it's so important, and you really are so cost-effective. I just wonder, if you close, what Veterans Affairs will do basically to pick up the slack that your organizations provide for our veterans. Do you have some good recommendations for us on how we could help you make it through this second and, hopefully, last wave?

• (1720)

Mr. Mike Gimblett: We need help with operational funding. It's very obvious, sir, that we are all very good at fundraising, because we've shown that pre-COVID. But now with COVID, and having a very limited ability to fundraise, we need help just to keep the lights on and pay our bills, and things like that. Like I said before, we have never asked for help. We've always been the group helping. Now, through no fault of our own, we're in a very tough situation and need help to get through the winter.

Ms. Linda Brimson: I would add a couple of things: funding either through federal funding or through downstream organizations that might focus on assisting small museums; helping us have better accessibility, as our veterans use more walkers, wheelchairs, canes, and have less walking ability; and helping to maintain these heritage buildings safely and to have good walkways, good lighting, a paved parking lot. Frankly, if a lot of these grassroots organizations go, I don't think the federal government will be replacing us. Right now the federal government can't meet the individual needs of somebody like our witness here, Max. The money isn't filtering down to a grassroots level. It's been challenging for us to access and do a new horizons grant, that type of thing.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Thank you very much for that.

We just completed a study on the backlog and we see so many veterans not being able to get their support, sometimes waiting years for it. What really impresses me about your organizations and why I see you as so vital is that a veteran can walk in the door and immediately see a familiar face, somebody who can relate to them, have conversations with them, like-minded thoughts and experiences, and make them feel comforted in their community.

Do you see yourself over the next couple of months being able to bridge the challenges coming out of the pandemic? I know that the program that was announced was for \$20 million. The Legion has access to \$14 million.

Mr. Gimblett, my understanding, because your organizations aren't part of the Legion, is that you don't get that funding downstream, as Ms. Brimson mentioned. You have to come up with some other ideas. My understanding is that you found out about the program funding for the \$6 million last Wednesday. You had four days to make the application. Were you able to get your application in on time? Did you find out how the decision-making process was going to be? How long is it going to be before you get those decisions so that you can make plans to make it through the winter months?

The Chair: Mr. Carrie, I'm sorry, you're well over time here, but I will allow a quick answer to at least one of those questions.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Thank you very much.

Mr. Mike Gimblett: As MP Carrie said, we found out last Wednesday that we had to have the applications in by Sunday. Just taking a very quick look at the funds, we didn't want to be greedy; all that we applied for was help with our insurance.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Up next we have MP Samson.

I may cut you a little short, sir, because we want to carve out some time for quick committee business.

• (1725)

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you. I want to thank all the presenters here today. It's extremely important.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gaboriault, thank you very much for your presentation. It was of great importance in helping us better understand your situation and this project, which is very important.

You talked about going back to school to continue your education. Was it through Veterans Affairs Canada's Education Assistance Program?

Mr. Max Gaboriault: No, it was as part of the retirement for medical reasons and army discharge process.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Max Gaboriault: My pleasure.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I also thank you for your years of service; we are very grateful to you.

[English]

Mr. Booth, as you know, your organization received \$1.5 million last week for the very important task that you and your organization do. I know my time is running very quickly, but can you tell us what the plan is with that money in the next three months—the short term—to make sure that you continue to support your veterans?

Mr. Nick Booth: Yes. Our plan over the next three months would be to make sure we can continue to deliver our community programs to our partners and also stabilize our organization so that we can continue to represent and advocate for veterans with the government, as we've been doing throughout the crisis.

To that point, I want to answer Mr. Carrie's point about recommendations.

The other thing I would strongly suggest that the committee might note is the ongoing importance of the well-being fund. It's something that veterans organizations across Canada can apply for. They are distributing the balance of the \$3.5 million of the VOESF, but ongoing. I know that as the government progresses money each year, there is always a jostle for the budget, but the ongoing importance of the well-being fund, not only to True Patriot Love but also to many veterans organizations, is critical.

I would leave that as a plea.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I thank you very much for underlining the well-being fund. I believe that fund will be open in the next few weeks before the end of the year. It's going to be extremely important to continue to help other organizations on the ground.

Thank you.

The Chair: Is that all you have?

Mr. Darrell Samson: I have more, but you told me I only had two or three minutes.

The Chair: I'll cut you off; don't worry. You have about another minute or so.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Okay.

Well then, Mrs. Brimson, thank you for your testimony. I really appreciate that you were able to share with the committee the point that even before the pandemic, there were challenges.

The pandemic may have helped your organization and many organizations to look at other ways of doing business to support your organization and community. I look at this as being a very positive way of supporting. Can you tell me one or two things that you may be going to do differently, things that you didn't do before?

Ms. Linda Brimson: Yes, we're going to try to get some more relationships, as a small museum, between some volunteer students, the university.... Even if we have to pay a small amount, it's worth getting a good archivist and some assistance with our indexing.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Were you able to have any of the Canada student program for students this year for the museum?

Ms. Linda Brimson: We didn't get it through that, but we did through Pillar Nonprofit group. We had two volunteers pre-COVID helping us with cataloguing.

The Chair: I will cut you off now, sir, if that's okay. I appreciate it.

Folks, thank you so much for helping us with this study and taking some time out of your busy schedules to answer our questions. I will ask the witnesses to vacate the meeting shortly.

If the MPs will indulge me and stay on, I just have one committee business item to go over.

Again, to the witnesses, thank you so much. I thank you all for the work you're doing on the ground, both in your organizations and as volunteers. It really does make a lot of difference to the veterans you serve.

Thank you.

● (1730)

Mr. Nick Booth: Thank you for your time today.

Ms. Linda Brimson: Thank you, and bye for now.

Ms. Deanna Fimrite: Thank you so much.

Mr. Mike Gimblett: Thank you for the opportunity.

The Chair: As they are leaving, I'll explain that we didn't have any business scheduled for today, but something's come up, obviously. The fall economic statement will be on Monday, as scheduled for four o'clock. It is completely up to us if we wish to have a meeting at that time, as opposed to attending the fall economic statement. I wanted to make this a committee decision and not mine.

For Monday, we have three witnesses scheduled for the study that we are doing currently. I have conferred with the clerk. We do have runway on either the 7th or....

I'm sorry, Madam Clerk, was it the 11th?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Jolène Savoie-Day): We have December 7, or Wednesday, December 9.

The Chair: That's December 7 or Wednesday, December 9 that we could move this to.

I am concerned about Wednesday's meeting more than I am about Monday's because that is the day we're going to be reviewing the report on the backlog. Of course, the number one priority of this committee is to get that in before we rise for the Christmas break. I am being told that it is a fairly short report; it's about 27 pages.

What we are planning to do is to extend Wednesday to three hours, which would hopefully give us more than enough time to finish and approve the study on Wednesday. We're going to need to really buckle down and do that in order for me to have the runway to be able to table it the following week, which is the last sitting week of the House.

There are really two questions I'm asking. One, are we going to move Monday's meeting to the 7th, which is currently open? Two, do I have approval to extend the meeting to three hours? Obviously, we'll build in some bio breaks, if needed.

I do think the will of this committee is to get this study done and wrapped up before we rise for the holiday.

Are there any thoughts?

Mr. John Brassard: If I can go, Mr. Chair, first of all, I don't know who's in Ottawa as part of the committee for the economic update. I expect that the expectation of the parties will be that all members be in the House for the update. I suspect it's going to be tabled in the House.

The Chair: It's at four o'clock on Monday.

Mr. John Brassard: It might be best that we postpone the meeting on Monday. I know that one of our members is dealing with a pre-scheduled health issue on Monday as well, so I would ask for some consideration with that, and maybe move it to Wednesday, do the three hours and then reschedule again for that other time.

That's what I know my position would be on this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Monsieur Desilets, do you have any thoughts on the matter?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: That's fine with me, Mr. Chair. I'm going to adapt. The three-hour meeting is fine by me.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

MP Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I am fine with a three-hour meeting. I think it makes sense to not have our committee meeting happen at the same time as the financial update. I know people are interested and want to engage in that process. I'm very happy for us to have a meeting on the 6th or the 9th. Just let us know and we'll do our best to accommodate.

The Chair: Okay.

Is there anyone from the Liberal side? All thumbs are up? That's excellent.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes, we're all good.

The Chair: That's great. I appreciate the co-operation there. We'll make this happen next week.

If there is no objection, I will move to adjourn the meeting.

Thank you very much, everybody. Take care.

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