

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Thursday, October 7, 2010**

**Legislative Chamber**

**Office of the Veterans Ombudsman**

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## **VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

Clarrie MacKinnon (Chair)  
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Sidney Prest  
Jim Boudreau  
Hon. Wayne Gaudet  
Harold Theriault  
Alfie MacLeod  
Allan MacMaster

[Alfie MacLeod was replaced by Hon. Cecil Clarke.]

In Attendance:

Kim Langille  
Legislative Committee Clerk

### **WITNESSES**

Office of the Veterans Ombudsman

Colonel (Retired) Patrick B. Stogran  
Veterans Ombudsman

Colleen Soltermann  
Director of Strategic Liaison



**HALIFAX, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2010**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**9:00 A.M.**

**CHAIR**  
Clarrie MacKinnon

THE CHAIR: Members, we have a little bit of a different format this morning. We are actually going to convene twice. We need a motion to recognize the possibility or to agree to have Legislative TV and the entire live cast and podcast take place for this meeting, which is unusual for this particular committee, but it is an important one and we are in the Legislature. What we will do is entertain a motion to that effect.

JIM BOUDREAU: I so move.

THE CHAIR: Is there a seconder?

HON. CECIL CLARKE: So is this to televise all proceedings from hereto forward for committees?

THE CHAIR: No, this is just for today.

CECIL CLARKE: Why wouldn't we do it . . .

THE CHAIR: Because we are here in the Legislature today, and I guess the importance of this particular guest is significant as well.

So is there a seconder to the motion? We have the Legislative TV people standing by. Is there a seconder? I'm not trying to push this through, but we will have to adjourn and reconvene in a couple of minutes when they're set up. Is there any discussion?

CECIL CLARKE: Mr. Chairman, I would just say that I think it's important to note for committees and everything else that if we're going to start setting precedent that it would be that all committee proceedings, for the benefit of Nova Scotians - definitely we want to welcome our esteemed guests here today - but from hereto forward that all proceedings of committees be available via the Web TV and by the Internet and streamed because I think there are many topics, many issues that people would enjoy as well. I would duly note that for committees and suggest that to the Speaker.

THE CHAIR: Is there any further discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

We will recess for about three minutes to get Legislative TV in operation.

[9:07 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[9:11 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Good morning, committee members and guests. We're delighted to have with us this morning, Colonel Stogran and Ms. Colleen Soltermann, Director of Strategic Liaison. We will call our meeting to order and we'll begin with introductions.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: We'll now call on each of our guests for just a little bit of background. Colonel Stogran.

COL. PATRICK STOGRAN (RET.): I'm a colonel retired from the Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry, now the Veterans Ombudsman.

COLLEEN SOLTERMANN: I've been with the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman for about four months now, so it has been a very interesting period of time.

THE CHAIR: We're very honoured and delighted to have you here this morning as our guest and we look forward to a presentation from you. I'm sure there are many questions for you this morning. Before beginning I just want to indicate that my constituency office on a number of occasions has dealt with your office in Ottawa and has dealt with that office with success. Thank you. Colonel Stogran.

PATRICK STOGRAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Honourable members, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for inviting me. I've appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and the Senate Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs on several occasions but this is the first time that I've been afforded the opportunity to appear before any provincial committee. I'm delighted

to be here, it's very much an honour for me because the issues confronting and challenging veterans and their families today should not belong to one jurisdiction only, they transcend any single authority and need to be viewed in a holistic way with the engagement from all levels of government and, importantly, engagement from veterans themselves.

Veterans and their families live amongst us, work amongst us, and too often suffer silently in our presence. It is time to put a halt to that reality. These courageous men and women who have put their lives on the line for us during their years of service in the Canadian Forces and the RCMP deserve a lot better than that.

When veterans leave the service, particularly the Canadian Forces, the number one challenge they face, apart from dealing with and overcoming operational injuries, is reintegration into civilian life. That, I can say first-hand, is tough to do. It is a big jump from active service to civilian life and too often the support systems needed at the local level just aren't there. That is an area where provinces and municipalities could play a bigger role. Just look at the positives, what veterans bring to community life. They bring loyalty, a sense of duty, a strong work ethic, a solid skills base, and a disciplined approach to work and life, amongst others. You know this well because here in Nova Scotia you experience the economic multiplying effect of veterans choosing to live in communities such as Halifax and Greenwood. We need to work together to make that a positive experience for veterans, their families, and individual Canadians in every community across this country.

[9:15 a.m.]

I have left you with a presentation that briefly outlines the mandate of the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman and how we're organized. It also provides information on some of the issues that we're addressing. I'll not speak to that in this presentation but will be happy to take questions on that later. Rather, in my presentation I'd like to focus on how I went about my job in the past three years and identify some of the key areas of concern and some of the issues that I've observed.

When I was named Canada's first Veterans Ombudsman on Remembrance Day, November 11, 2007, I was very optimistic that I would be able to establish an effective office that would be able to provide the much-needed support to veterans seeking access to Veterans Affairs programs, benefits and services. I dove in full force and within a year the office was up and running, both in Charlottetown and in Ottawa. I thought the system truly wanted a veterans ombudsman to act as a catalyst for constructive change.

The office in the past three years has resolved approximately 4,000 case files as of last month. I personally have travelled coast to coast with my team and listened to what veterans have to say about the benefits and services they are receiving, or not receiving for the most part. I've launched on-line public consultations on our Web site and I've visited many long-term care facilities, hospitals, and homeless shelters across our

country. Strong relationships were developed with veteran organizations and other interested stakeholders across Canada. We published reports and observations and I, of course, gave many interviews to raise awareness of the office and the problems that we are working to resolve.

As well as Ombudsman, I've placed particular emphasis on the New Veterans Charter and its implications for today's veterans. The New Veterans Charter was given Royal Assent in May 2005, some five years ago, with the clear acknowledgment at the time that it wasn't perfect. At that time it was agreed that as a living charter it would be continuously reviewed and evaluated, presumably to ensure that "the recognized obligation of the people and Government of Canada to those who have served their country so well and to their dependants, may be fulfilled." I say "presumably" because while that obligation, that quote, is clearly stated in the preamble to all other pieces of legislation regarding veterans, nowhere in the charter does it say as much.

Other Acts also direct that they shall be "liberally construed and interpreted." Although it might be argued that the Interpretation Act accommodates this, it does not do so to the end of ensuring that the veterans and their families receive the treatment they rightfully deserve. Saying nothing, to me, says a lot. Was that omission simply an oversight or is it yet another sign of an evolving change to our commitment to veterans?

My perception of change and commitment is also apparent in other departmental policies, plans and programs. The most noteworthy is Veterans Affairs Canada's clear intention to stop maintaining priority access beds or contract beds for elderly veterans. Currently only World War II and Korean War veterans have access to departmental contract beds. For the some 592,000 Canadian Forces veterans who are not eligible for these beds, is the country less committed to their needs?

The lump sum disability award has been the focus of fierce criticism from the veterans community. In town hall meetings in communities across Canada I've encountered this criticism first-hand. As an incentive to make it more appealing for disabled veterans to go back to work rather than remaining on disability, the program is viewed by many as a step back from the commonly recognized obligation of the people and Government of Canada.

We should not be under the misapprehension that this issue is new. In 1928 the House Committee on Pension and Returned Soldiers' Problems dealt with this very same issue of having given soldiers lump sums under the Pension Act, where in retrospect a committee member stated: We should never have passed that law, to which the chairman replied: I think we are all agreed on that now. In my view, it doesn't make sense to hand disabled veterans a fistful of money and expect them to have the means to go off and start a new life for themselves.

As a soldier, I naively believed that the system had my back when I was in harm's way and that I and my family would be looked after if something happened to me. What I

did not understand was the torturous process to receive those benefits and the imbedded lack of willingness to want to change that process. What is especially hard to reconcile is that over the past years I sold that system as working to the soldiers who were under my command.

Service in the Canadian Forces and the RCMP is not just another job. Within the Canadian Forces and the RCMP changing jobs is not uncommon. During my career in the Army I had at least 15 jobs; however, service in the Canadian Forces and the RCMP is actually a way of life, it is a culture unto itself. As my wife says, soldiering is not what he does it's who he is.

For me, and I dare say many, many veterans leaving the military, it was a huge culture shock that makes reintegration into the civilian workforce much more problematic than simply finding a new job. When a psychological or physical disability is combined with that culture shock, the transition from the CF or the RCMP back to civilian life is that much more difficult. I hasten to suggest that this may, in fact, be beyond the comprehension of anyone who has not served in uniform.

A wound or injury suffered in the line of duty or preparing for combat operations cannot and should not be likened to an industrial accident, yet the design of the New Veterans Charter incorporates the prescriptive, long-term, disability-based formulas of an insurance company and fails to foster the department's new "needs-based" philosophy. While changes have been announced recently to enhance some of the aspects of the New Veterans Charter, I nevertheless reassert my urging that the New Veterans Charter needs to be revised comprehensively. It must also be done quickly, transparently and provide full retroactivity to all veterans who have been affected by it.

We have come to a significant milestone in our history regarding the treatment of veterans and the decisions we make now will affect veterans, their families and indeed our country for decades to come. It's time to make decisions now, I came to that realization after almost three years of fighting even to be heard. I realized finally that I needed to speak up before my tenure as Ombudsman was finished. The result was the press conference of August 17<sup>th</sup> which focused - I emphasize - on veterans' issues, not my renewal. I want to emphasize to you that to publicly criticize institutions that I believed were supporting me and my comrades was extremely distasteful, but I felt I had no alternative.

The effect of that press conference has been enormous. The outpouring of the frustration and anger from veterans and their families is unparalleled in recent history. How can we go from all of the optimism talked about in 2005, the Year of the Veteran, to what is becoming now in 2010, the year of veterans' protest. These are strategic areas that need to be addressed.

The delivery of veteran benefits is a national security issue, it's not a social program. To effectively recruit, employ and deploy the Canadian Forces, service

personnel must have complete faith in the system that looks after them while serving and especially after service. Obviously, as the frequency and intensity of operations increase, so must the effect it has on those who serve. Accordingly, when decision makers are increasing the Canadian Forces operational tempo and placing service personnel in harm's way, they should be factoring into their calculations what capacity is going to be required to respond to veterans' needs afterwards.

The so-called New Veterans Charter is not really a charter, but a product of slick marketing. After World War II, a number of Acts came in force that covered disability payments, education, land grants, loans, insurance, many things of this nature, to not only those with medical conditions but for the able-bodied as well. The comprehensiveness of all these Acts collectively became known as the Veterans Charter.

Today, we should be calling the so-called New Veterans Charter by its actual name, the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act. It is only one Act supported by the other older Acts and as the words state in the title, it basically does two things: it compensates for injury and it provides benefits to support re-establishing someone into a job. It does not adequately address such things as the effect if one can't get a job, or the long-term effect on families, or the providing of adequate reintegration benefits for those who are not medically released. This Act is not a comprehensive package of benefits like what was implemented after World War II.

So why today are we experiencing the backlash of frustrated veterans? For decades now the system has been reducing entitlements and making it increasingly difficult to obtain services and benefits. I am convinced that what made the post-World War II demobilization so successful was that veterans truly had a say in how veterans should be treated, and they were in positions in Parliament and government to influence those outcomes in a most positive way. Their foresight and wisdom still benefit us today. I recognize that the demographics of that time frame enabled a significant number of veterans from World War I to be in key positions to influence the development of benefits. That is definitely not the case today.

Veterans participate in a variety of committees and appear before various parliamentary committees but there are few, if any, veterans within the corridors of power who can actually provide a veteran's perspective when decisions are made. Veterans deserve representation.

The role of the Veterans Ombudsman needs to be legislated to allow unrestricted access to information, to address issues that cross multiple departments and to ensure that the office is perceived as a credible institution, independent of government. After three years the department provides me less information than it does the veterans' associations or indeed the media. It is very clear to me now that despite the commitment made by the Prime Minister on April 3, 2007, the system did not want a true ombudsman and it successfully subverted efforts to establish one.



The time has come for meaningful changes. There is an important role for the provinces and municipalities to play as partners in ensuring that veterans are successfully integrated back into civilian life. Innovative measures are needed and Nova Scotia has the opportunity to be at the forefront of their development and implementation.

The actions and decisions that are made in relation to veterans' issues today will affect Canada and Canadians for decades to come. I feel it's a duty to ensure that the people and the Government of Canada truly understand veterans' concerns and needs. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Colonel Stogran, for such a forthright presentation to us. This committee operates much differently than other committees of the Legislature in the fact that we don't allow allocations of time to each political Party, we operate on a speakers list and no one has ever monopolized that in the past. This committee is meeting eight to 10 times a year and in the past the Veterans Affairs Committee has usually met about twice a year, so I think this is a very active committee and we really appreciate you coming to speak to us. I understand, as you said, this is the first time you have come to a provincial committee, so we're quite honoured with that, thank you.

PATRICK STOGRAN: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: We'll begin a speakers list. Mr. Prest.

SIDNEY PREST: One question regarding assistance for a parent of a veteran that has been deceased. What assistance is available if they are taking care of, say, some grandchildren in that residence?

[9:30 a.m.]

PATRICK STOGRAN: If they're taking care of which?

SIDNEY PREST: Grandchildren of a deceased veteran.

PATRICK STOGRAN: My colleague could probably get into the specifics.

SIDNEY PREST: Where would the cut-off be or what is . . .

COLLEEN SOLTERMANN: I think that's a very particular, specific question around veterans, their parents and family members. To be honest, I don't think that the Ombudsman's Office is in the position to actually answer detailed questions about what the benefits are that Veterans Affairs Canada does provide. I think that would be Veterans Affairs itself that should be responding to that question.

While there are some benefits that are available to children, the extent to which grandparents are supported is not really within my capacity to respond to.

PATRICK STOGRAN: I think that characterizes the system right now. I have been in the office for three years and I would not go out on a limb to comment on the very specifics as you mentioned. What I have witnessed, though, is that the system is not flexible enough to cater to individual situations, crisis situations such as you've described. There are contingency funds, those kinds of things, the ability to modify programs.

I would emphasize that the New Veterans Charter, when it was first brought into effect, was supposed to be needs-based. It was supposed to offer the people in the front lines the flexibility to address the particular needs of each situation, which I think is desperately required. What has happened is they have introduced the Act but they have carried on business as normal, with a complex web of policies and practices and entitlement grids that lie beneath the surface, the thin veneer of what the programs are that are available in that area where veterans are severely disadvantaged.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Gaudet.

HON. WAYNE GAUDET: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin by thanking Colonel Stogran for his presentation this morning. I want to focus a little bit on how veterans access the services of your office. In your presentation you pointed out that you have an office in Charlottetown and one in Ottawa. In my area with the Canadian Legion, they have a service officer so I'm just curious. Maybe let me begin with, how do veterans access your services or your office? Let me begin with that one.

PATRICK STOGRAN: Basically on our Web site we have a 1-877 number. We have e-mail addresses, we have phones that are manned during working hours, and I also travel the country conducting town halls and advertise those as broadly as possible. I think I've done two or three here in Halifax, so there is any variety of ways.

WAYNE GAUDET: So is it preferable for veterans from Nova Scotia to contact the Charlottetown office or is there a difference as to where they should call?

PATRICK STOGRAN: No, sir, in fact I encourage everyone, if they have the slightest question or problem, to call our Charlottetown office. I like to consider ourselves - I consider Veterans Affairs Canada to be a conventional army, if you will, and I consider our team to be like Special Forces. It is very, very important that anybody who has a problem calls our office in Charlottetown and talks to our people on the front lines because in many cases, as I've mentioned, they can resolve it themselves. We've resolved over 4,000 issues and the secret to our success is that we spend time on the phones actually communicating with veterans.

WAYNE GAUDET: I guess I'm just looking for clarification on procedures here. With the service officer at home, is it advisable for veterans to go through the proper channels, through their service officer at home, before they contact your office or does it

matter?

PATRICK STOGRAN: Well, that's a very good question, sir. We're not there to replace the system so in the first instance, veterans and eligible others should be contacting service officers in ANAVETS or the Royal Canadian Legion and initiating their claims with Veterans Affairs Canada. We're there to troubleshoot the system and so we are kind of superimposed. We're not allowed to review the decisions, we're not allowed to engage in the actual presentation of cases. What we do is where there's a miscommunication or perhaps unfair practices, service officers will come to us and we will, shall I say, attack the bureaucracy, address the bureaucratic process.

WAYNE GAUDET: Great, thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Clarke.

CECIL CLARKE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and indeed welcome to our guests. Colonel Stogran, I'm very pleased that you're here and I know here in this province, and just to provide a little background, we have a very proud tradition amongst all three Parties of this Legislature the fact that we have a Veterans Affairs Committee that works very closely on these issues and has worked collaboratively over the years on consensus, which has been very positive. When you think of the things that this House has always been part of, with the naming of the Veterans Memorial Highway, with having a veterans licence plate, with celebrating the Year of the Veteran here in a very substantive way where all 52 members were part of a program with the Peacekeepers Way highway being named in Cape Breton and being the first province in Canada, as a province, to have a Minister responsible for Military Relations, which also deals with our connection to Veterans Affairs.

I am very proud of the Nova Scotian history, which is an all-Party history, and we in this province have not politicized our role and involvement but have definitely dealt with how we respond and deal with the needs. I think you're talking today about where a system and the resources for that system and the outcomes are just not in check at this point, and there has been some transformational change.

I know in the traditional setting, because in my own provincial constituency we have the Harbour View Veterans Hospital, I know in Glace Bay the unit there, there's a lot of great work, especially working with our Legions, because of the service officers, as Mr. Gaudet has talked about, who work as advocates and help us, as MLAs, to be navigators in some cases, when I know in a lot of cases we've dealt with the widow of a deceased veteran looking for supports because there is a need there or veterans trying to gain access to a system that is just that, a system. Systems, as you know, have lots of bureaucracy and, over time, program things can change, so you can sit and look and say over the last four years \$1 billion has been added for veterans supports, which would be about \$500,000 a year, but if the bureaucracy that's trying to implement it is out of sync - are you allocating those dollars, as you say, on a needs basis, to the core areas that are

required?

I guess one of the things is, as a first question, Mr. Chairman, I've noticed that there is a traditional veteran, for the lack of a better word, the people who I would deal with in our Legion branches - the modern-day veteran tends not to be engaged in more formalized organizations like the Legion or Army Navy Vets Associations and the like - where there is an advocacy built in and there's a direct connection because as politicians, we are at those organizations all the time, you are on the front line of concerns that would come forward, versus the modern-day veteran who isn't maybe as engaged in formalized processes. I think that's something the system doesn't have an ability to connect at this point. Where do you see the difference between the two or how do we get both of those on the same page, because the needs of a traditional veteran versus a modern-day one are very clearly there?

One of the things I referenced that I've seen is that in some ways the lump-sum payment, for instance, that you referenced, may be seen as advantageous to deal with money up front to deal with an issue. A couple of years go by and the money is gone but the person's issues have not gone away; in fact, will not go away. I think there's a recognition that maybe that was good in principle but not in practice, so I don't know, just on that piece first and I have a couple of other questions.

PATRICK STOGRAN: Yes, sir, you bring up a very relevant point. I would first say that when you look at a veteran, the commitment that a service person makes today when they join the Canadian Forces or the RCMP is absolutely no different from the commitment that our people made in the Second World War. They sign up for life and they may have no intention of making a career of it but they may, in fact, have their life terminated while they are serving the country or irreparably changed in satisfying that commitment.

What has changed is the commitment of government to, first of all, the conflicts that we send our people to overseas. We can walk away from Croatia and Bosnia and blame it all on the UN, unlike the Second World War and Juno Beach. They have also changed their commitment to veterans. They're stepping away from the traditional approach to dealing with veterans. I dare say that the needs are every bit the same as the Second World War veterans coming home. I would say perhaps the role of Veterans Affairs has become even more important because, as you say, we have the Royal Canadian Legion and ANAVETS where the traditional veterans migrated to.

When I first came back from Afghanistan I used to go around to the young soldiers I encountered and say, guys, you've got to join something like the Legion, there's got to be that unity. If you don't want to join the Legion, you should create your own association. Veterans are famous for - a conflict isn't over very long before the veterans get together and create another association. The response that I received from the young people is, sir, are you on Facebook? We've already got our association. So in a sense they're satisfying that need but the difficulty is, it's very difficult to reach out to them.

I think that Veterans Affairs should be more proactive and I know in our office, because of my experiences in trying to recruit Afghanistan veterans, we've been very proactive in social media. I'm on Twitter, I'm on Facebook, our Web site, those kinds of things, in order to try to bring the veteran into the fold. I think that's probably my biggest frustration, that Veterans Affairs is there when asked but the problem is self-identification. I don't think that veterans - I know veterans don't understand what their entitlements are, modern-day veterans or the traditional veterans.

The other piece is, I think Veterans Affairs treats provinces as merely service providers, not as a partner, not in the proactive, personal, needs-based kind of way that I think has to happen in this day and age. I don't know if that answers your question, sir.

CECIL CLARKE: I appreciate that. I guess with my experience here in the province, because it just may be our history and our heritage of working so closely and recognizing that the relationship, maybe we happen to be a bit more hands-on just because it's a smaller province and we connect at a community level and are aware of those issues that may be more fractured in other areas.

The component of when you say needs-based and lump sums, I think there definitely has been a problem and a challenge with that and you've highlighted that. I guess you have talked about, as well, in between the modern day, where I know I worked with the peacekeepers association which has a formalized group because that is becoming a larger group and has organized nationally and I know is very active here in Nova Scotia and active at home for myself. One of the things that flowed out of the peacekeepers and also someone you would have talked to, one of my constituents, is Mel Birmingham who is a police officer who served in peacekeeping duties, served alongside and equally with those in regular forces, yet come back and are not recognized as a veteran even though their peers and colleagues out there were recognized.

I think some of those things are where the system just wasn't there to accommodate it, that there wasn't a recognition of that. Like everything else, we all know too well, as politicians, bureaucracy, the good intent of a Budget Address versus its implementation can sometimes get missed or there are challenges that come up. I can look at money going in but part of the issue is where the outcomes are and who is getting the benefit of those resources, and especially it's not going in to build more bureaucracy but give more benefit.

My second question is, where do you see, from the bureaucratic side - and I don't mean anything negative about the women and men who serve, but they are part of a system that is in between what you are doing and what the politicians and the government would fund. Are there things that you've experienced, specifically to impediments that are there that are just the bureaucracy in the system and not people? What are the biggest impediments? Is it policy that just isn't in sync? You bring in a charter, you've got budgets that come in and it's just that everyone is trying to do good things, it all sounds

great in announcements, but in the practical outcome we have to kind of pull back and say wait a minute, let's pull these pieces here because the benefit isn't going where we want it to go.

[9:45 a.m.]

I'm just wondering, is there some major stumbling block or several you've seen about the system?

PATRICK STOGRAN: Sir, what a question. There's a huge number of stumbling blocks. Bureaucracy is the tip of the iceberg.

You bring up Mel Birmingham and that's a hugely relevant observation in this day and age. You know we have this mindset that because of what we experienced in World War I and World War II, that's the way wars are fought - they are industrial in nature and we throw all the instruments of national power at it and we come home and dust ourselves off and that's the end of it. Meanwhile, we've been sending people off into harm's way since the Korean War. I dare say that in retrospect we've been on the leading edge of modern conflict.

I cringe when I hear the term "peacekeeping" because from my professional years I viewed peacekeeping as an excuse to dismantle the Canadian Forces yet keep our place at the international table. The Cold War was over and we started going to the hot wars. What I realized when I came back from Afghanistan is that the tactics, techniques and procedures that we used on peacekeeping are exactly the way you should be conducting counter-insurgency operations.

In this day and age we are in the century of surprises. Gone are the days of the industrial kind of war when that kind of terminated with the war of ideals of the Cold War. Now we're looking at the fallout from that bipolar confrontation. All of these puppet states and nations that the two superpowers were maintaining, they've been dissolved, so places like Yugoslavia have fallen apart, Somalia, Yemen, all of these places.

What we are facing now, what our Canadian Forces and RCMP are facing now is not the industrial armies that we are accustomed to, not standing between two nation states who, in the case of Cyprus, were actually our allies, we are fighting criminals and terrorists. It requires a much deeper commitment on the part of the country and we are shoulder to shoulder with the RCMP on operations, diplomats, CEDA, firefighters from municipalities, corrections workers, in order to try to build the capacity of Afghanistan to look after themselves.

So what about the Mel Birmingham of this world today, these people who have been seconded to the RCMP, have worked overseas shoulder to shoulder with the Canadian Forces, coming from the municipalities, suffered the kinds of wounds that soldiers suffer? Then they're thrown onto the provincial system and the provincial

systems, in many cases, are not able to deal with some of the things that somebody who has been injured or wounded on operations is facing.

I think the numbers of those are going to increase. The RCMP is terrible at - with these seconded police officers who are coming from places like Cape Breton and Halifax, they are worse in looking after them than the Canadian Forces is in looking after their reservists who go off into the provinces. So the provinces play such a pivotal role in so many of these things. I can tell you that it's the deliberate intent of Veterans Affairs to step away from their obligation and to hand these wounded warriors - for lack of a better term and I use that in the broadest sense - over to the provincial systems.

André Morin did an investigation in the psychological facilities that were available to families in and around the Petawawa area because of the number of families that were being destroyed by the stresses of sending their loved ones overseas. He found the situation woeful and went to the provincial government. Initially the provincial government's response was, well, the feds picked the fight, they can look after it. Now, to their credit, they rallied up and recognized their obligation in terms of the constitutional obligation to provide health care facilities but there's a huge disconnect between the Canadian Forces and sending people overseas into harm's way, Veterans Affairs in dealing with them, and then the provinces that are saddled with the responsibility.

I'm going to be visiting a case here in Halifax today, a gentleman who is not too many years ahead of me in the Canadian Forces, suffered severe post-traumatic stress disorder and statistically in the United States they've determined that post-traumatic stress disorder, people who suffer from it have a higher propensity for early-onset dementia. This person is just turning 60 and is completely disabled now, a complete ward of the state in Halifax here, and Veterans Affairs basically washes their hands of it. They will do a little bit, whatever I force them into, but otherwise it's a provincial problem.

The question you asked, sir, is very complicated.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr. Boudreau.

JIM BOUDREAU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Colonel Stogran and Ms. Soltermann, thank you very much for coming here today. Colonel Stogran, I certainly thank you for your dedication to the issues and concerns that are important to veterans. Your passion, your concern is certainly evident today and has been evident in many of the things that you've done up to this date in your capacity as the Ombudsman.

One of my questions, I suppose it would dovetail to what you've just spoken about, but in your presentation you referred to support services and the lack thereof. I'm wondering, would you be so kind as to share some of your main concerns with regard to the lack of support services that you see presently and you see as absolutely necessary to deal with some of the concerns that your office has identified?

PATRICK STOGRAN: Another very broad question - where are the lackings? I'm puzzled here because they all exist in one shape or another within the provinces. The problem is they lack the focus on the veterans, they lack the empathy and the understanding of people who have moved around every two to three years and, in the case of the Navy, been posted from Halifax to Ottawa to Victoria and back again.

The lack of services, I think what it is, is long-term care. It exists in the provinces, but what is missing is Veterans Affairs involvement to make sure that it satisfies the need of the culture of the military. Family support services, they're getting better at it. A normal civilian family has the support services in the local community, but when you've been posted around every two to three years it's very hard to get integrated into the community. In the past it was easy because the military was a very closed society, and we had the married quarters and nobody ventured outside of that. It's different today.

I had another thought. You know, I think what it is, it's just the lack of Veterans Affairs involvement in bringing these services to that unique culture that is a veteran, if you will. I can't overemphasize that it's a culture shock leaving the military. I myself, I've never voted in municipal elections, I knew nothing about it because I was always on the road, my family stayed behind. If I didn't have this job where I could be passionate about looking after my comrades in arms, I would have been a mess. I wouldn't have known how to go about the civilian workforce. I've had probably 15 or 20 jobs in my career but moving to the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman, to me that wasn't a job shift, that was a culture shift, trying to become a civilian.

I tell people often, I don't know what it's like to be a civilian. People my age, somebody in their 50s, have spent 30 years finding themselves as a civilian. To me, life was a battle drill. I've been a civilian now for three years, I'm trying to make up for lost time. I don't really understand the civilian side of things. So from my perspective, I think what's lacking right now is Veterans Affairs engagement to partner with the provinces in - I wouldn't say in a less adversarial way, but actually becoming a little more empathetic and working with the provinces to have those institutions that exist for civilian society more accessible to veterans, if you will.

I don't know if that answers your question - once again, it's a very, very broad question. I bring out long-term care, even something as simple as daycare. For some of the wives of veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury, for example - and I don't know if you're familiar with it - these huge explosions that are killing our soldiers, the concussive blasts from those things are causing what's known as traumatic brain injury. Long- and short-term memory disappears and the wives become very much a permanent support system for their husbands.

The civilian support structures out there can't relate to - well, I shouldn't say can't relate because there are people hurt on the job who require that kind of care, but they can't relate to the military culture. PTSD, for example, I've had wives come to me who are very much suffering vicariously from post-traumatic stress disorder. My wife is a



victim of post-traumatic stress. I had a great career, but when I'm asleep I flail, and I've had problems with alcohol and those kinds of things. If there's a divorce in the family, those wives are thrown into a provincial system that doesn't understand that this person has moved around every two to three years and that's why they haven't carved out a life for themselves in the community. Once again, I'm sorry if I'm not getting specific enough.

JIM BOUDREAU: No, sir, you are giving me a better understanding and a better flavour for some of the supports that I know you referred to in your presentation. I understand that the question was very broad and it was intended to be that way, because I personally just needed a better understanding of some of the concepts and concerns that you were alluding to. Thank you very much for that.

PATRICK STOGRAN: And I must apologize, as I said, this is my first encounter into the provincial system. I visited many provincial Ombudsmen in order to coordinate our activities, but the whole question of how Veterans Affairs could be working better with the provinces is something that, certainly for my successor, I'm going to bring up as a point that requires dedicated study.

THE CHAIR: Mr. MacMaster.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Thank you, Colonel Stogran. One of the things I'd like to get more information on, or some of your perspective, I've been doing some reading lately about during the time of the Depression. Of course, after the First World War, the economy was booming because they were rebuilding Europe and a lot of it was being financed by the United States and other countries, so there was lots of work here at home. But then the Depression hit.

I'm to a point in the book where it's describing about how some of the soldiers were marching - in this case it was taking place in the U.S. - on to Washington, they were hopping on trains and whatever other way they could get there at the time, to demand some kind of an early payment of a benefit. I guess in those days, those soldiers left their careers to serve their country and then were expected to go back to their careers; whereas today, soldiers are professionals and it can be a career choice.

[10:00 a.m.]

When you were mentioning something about needs-based, like when soldiers return now, having a system that's needs-based would be better than something almost like a workers' compensation benefit: you got hurt, here's a monthly benefit to support your family income. Could you give some discussion on that and what would be the needs-based system that you think would be of better service to our new veterans?

PATRICK STOGRAN: Once again, a very specific question. (Laughter) The needs, how to define that - you bring up a very good point in terms of the professionalism

of the people who join the Canadian Forces and the RCMP today, that's another significant difference. People who went off to fight for Canada in the First and Second World Wars, the vast majority of them either came from a profession or a vocation that they expected to go back to as soon as they defeated the Huns, or they certainly had no intention of making a career out of the Canadian Forces. Now very many people join and they are expecting that the Canadian Forces is going to provide for their needs and their ability to satisfy the needs of their family. So that's the cup half full.

Veterans Affairs, on the other hand - at senior levels, senior bureaucrats, central agencies - feels that there was an obligation to the Second World War veterans because they were fighting for our country and we pulled them out of their jobs to send them overseas. I served in Bosnia and I saw people fighting for their lives. I was in the front lines watching people with hunting rifles fight off professional ex-JNA military and there was no promise that they would get back, that they would be brought back into the workforce. They were just happy to have a home to go to after the war was over.

In the case of the professionals now, Jody Mitic, for example, expected to have a 30-year career and now that has been cut short. I think in terms of providing for the needs, the reason why it's such a difficult question to answer and why it's particularly difficult with elected officials and bureaucrats to get into that discussion - I was cornered by a member of the House Committee on Parliament Hill with that very question, how do you control this? I want a policy, I want to be able to write something that will say these are the needs. Well, it's counterintuitive because the needs are individual-based.

Right now I'm writing my lessons learned over the last three years, I call it a blueprint for the fair treatment of veterans. One of the principles is - I took the term from the education profession - differentiated instruction, differentiated learning. In other words, kids with special needs have to be treated individually based on what their needs are, what their strengths are, their weakness. That's the way you should go about people in the military.

Take General Dallaire, for example, there's person suffering from supreme PTSD. He has been suicidal, by his own admission, much like myself, had some problems with alcohol. You treat him differently from a corporal in the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders who, at the same time, when they're overseas they're hugely self-actualized as a mere corporal.

If I may tell a story. A young corporal who worked for me in the 1990s, we lost touch, and when I was with Pearson Peacekeeping Centre I had the occasion to put together a panel discussion. We had representatives from the Red Cross and the UNHCR and all of these organizations to talk about this 21<sup>st</sup> Century war that we're in, in Afghanistan. They asked me to bring a military representative and I'm sure they were expecting me to bring General Natynczyk or somebody like that. I brought this young corporal. As the questions were going on, the aid workers were talking about the altruistic - peace and development and those kinds of things. This young corporal, every question he asked he turned it back to combat and being pinned down and under fire and all this

and I'm thinking, wow, I've really lost it here, lost the audience, done something wrong.

At the end of the panel discussion the question was asked to all of them, why do you do it? This young corporal sort of looked at the floor when it came to him and there was a huge pregnant pause and I'm thinking, what is he going to say now, unarmed combat or something that he hadn't brought up? What he said was, it's the thanks, I do it for the thanks. There's no better feeling in the world than being a soldier and having kids thank you for being there and wanting to touch you and those kinds of things.

You take a young person like that, a young corporal, take him out of the uniform, give him a stress injury and then throw him into society, he's going to suffer the same way General Dallaire did. If he likes working with wood, then he won't mind working at Home Depot, but for anybody who has been so self-actualized to be a Canadian diplomat in a place like Bosnia or Afghanistan or those kinds of things and help people, it's a huge letdown to get back out into society.

What I'm advocating in terms of reintegration, the job thing, it's not about giving the person a job, it's about mentoring this person until they find a job that gives them the purpose and meaning that they had when they were in uniform. I'll go back to General Dallaire - a broken man. I've known General Dallaire since he was a thrusting colonel in the late 1980s - a broken man. He's got a sense of purpose now as a Senator and that's hugely therapeutic, he's a new person.

So a long way to answer your question, but it has to be pushed down to the caseworker and every case has to be different. We spend more money now in oversight and the bureaucracy in head office than we do on the ground, up front, with a case manager who gets to know the individual and says okay, you don't need help finding a job but maybe you need help in some other area, rehabilitation or something like that. So just by definition, there is no pat answer, you have to trust the individuals who are working with the individuals.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Thank you, Colonel Stogran. Just building on that, on the needs, yesterday our caucus had a presentation from a group that works with people with disabilities. They put up on a wall a chart that showed all the programs available and all the people that someone who becomes disabled has to speak with to gain benefits and maybe to get themselves back in the workforce or to get certain types of specialized health care. It was incredible, all the lines that were drawn. My first reaction was, that looks like what we have to do in our constituency offices because a lot of times when people have difficulty accessing something from government, they go to their local politician.

It makes me wonder if the future of government shouldn't be more about - not about what government thinks the way things should be and everybody out there, you guys can figure it out. Maybe it should be more about us having offices that are like a constituency office, whereby people come in and we're a jack of all trades when you're

dealing with the government, one person can help you out with everything. Do you think a system like that might work better for our new veterans?

PATRICK STOGRAN: Definitely, but I don't think it's the provinces' responsibility to offer that. As I said, I think all the needs are in the provinces, to varying degrees, but I personally believe that Veterans Affairs should take on that paternal role in the district office here in Halifax and know the provincial system inside out, upside down and backwards, and be able to guide a wounded reservist who has come back from Afghanistan and settled here in Halifax, guide them to the various organizations that will offer them help. That's what's missing today from a veteran's perspective.

In many respects, what they're doing is they're unloading the veteran onto the province. So if Veterans Affairs isn't going to do it, I guess what I would say is yes, sir, the province should do it because they do need that service.

ALLAN MACMASTER: If I might just ask one short question. You had mentioned earlier in your presentation about somebody - I think it was in Ontario, it was around Petawawa, was it? - who had responded to you that while the federal government picked the fight, let them look after them. That, to me, seems like a terrible attitude to have towards Canadians who have served our country. Could you give a little background on why somebody would make a comment like that? Maybe there was good reason for it.

PATRICK STOGRAN: Because it was going to cost the province \$10 million to put the institutions in place to provide those services. So it comes down to dollars and cents. I can understand what the provinces face. I think from a bureaucratic perspective I can sympathize with the province being offloaded this huge burden; it's a huge burden. That's why, as I say in my speech here, it has been a rude awakening in the eleventh hour of my job that Veterans Affairs has to become more engaged with the various provinces. It's not just sort of doing the paperwork and firing them off to have the services looked after. They should understand that Petawawa, for example, is going to require additional health care facilities for the families.

If I may, when I make these presentations I kind of feel guilty because it's veterans this, veterans that and I feel almost like I'm self-serving, but there's a huge knock-on benefit for the provinces here. The problem is if you treat veterans, wounded or otherwise, as a social program, then they're missing the boat.

We talked about the Second World War, the education, the land grants, the vocational training, those kinds of things. I think veterans are a genuine resource for the provinces and they shouldn't be given a little bit of rehabilitation and vocational training and those kinds of things, they should be treated as an asset that might go to Greenwood and if a person has a habit of building furniture, build that ability, offer them some kind of a grant or a low-interest business loan so that maybe they can start a business in the Greenwood area. Treat them as a resource going out to the provinces.

Health care. Tommy Douglas is heralded as the founder of universal health care. Well, he didn't have to use too much grey matter when in every city there was a veterans hospital that was providing health care free to veterans. Somebody turned around - Mr. Douglas - and said, hey, that's something that all Canadians should have. I think we should be treating veterans as the standard. Mental health - epidemic proportions in civilian society. Why isn't Veterans Affairs and the Canadian Forces engaging this small community to develop new ways of dealing with these kinds of things? They have this captive audience that they can take from recruitment through to retirement and develop these things for the civilian community. But we treat them as a social program and the provinces will look after them.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Theriault.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Colonel Stogran, for your wonderful presentation, it was very interesting. You spoke about how your office has dealt with 4,000 issues, I believe you said. I don't know what they are, but I do know of a couple from my area, the Digby area, that I've worked on - a couple of veterans locally, tried to help them out.

One was a veteran who was hurt in the war and he came to the point where he needed a chairlift in his house to get upstairs - he had a two-storey place, instead of living on one floor he wanted to live on two - so we worked on that for two years and we got him a chairlift up to his second floor. Two years it took to get that done. Then I had another veteran who could walk up stairs, but he needed a pair of shoes because his feet were hurt during the war and he needed a special pair of shoes. We worked on that two years and to this day he still hasn't gotten those shoes.

I don't know what your list of 4,000 that you've worked on helped, but I would like to see it. I think that would be an eye-opener to all of us. Is it possible that that could be made public to this committee?

PATRICK STOGRAN: I think it might be difficult for us to list all of them. I know we do capture our success stories in things like our annual report, but we could probably make a good effort at identifying them. This gentleman who needs the special shoes - contact our office, I bet we can get them for him. Those are the kinds of things - and your imagination is the limit, but things like orthotic shoes, it just boggles the mind some of the things that veterans have to fight for. Orthopaedic toilet seats . . .

HAROLD THERIAULT: And the list goes on and on.

[10:15 a.m.]

PATRICK STOGRAN: Your imagination is the limit, sir, that's kind of why I'm balking at it because it's just overwhelming and it's minutia, things that you just wouldn't imagine the system forcing a veteran to fight for. What we've done is we've learned to

listen to veterans - as I say to my young people on the phones, the most stressful job in the Ombudsman's Office is our folks dealing on the phones - talk to the veterans, really understand their personal situation, and when you hang up the phone - they should own the problem - unload all of the baggage and frustration that this veteran will have for fighting for years, decades in some cases for some of these things, and then go over and talk to the decision maker in the department. That has been our success, just shedding a new light on a problem and they come around. These kinds of things - sir, if this gentleman hasn't contacted our office for his orthotic shoes . . .

HAROLD THERIAULT: But it shouldn't have to be that way. If you can get a \$10,000 chairlift in your home to take you upstairs and can't get a pair of \$200 shoes to take you upstairs, there's something wrong with that policy.

PATRICK STOGRAN: The mind boggles.

HAROLD THERIAULT: I'll touch on one more thing, too, and that is the Legions. These Legions, I believe, were established in this country, in this province anyway, as a place where soldiers could come together, veterans could come together and socialize and talk about their problems, just socialize to help one another. In our community we have one Legion that I believe is soon going to be on the real estate list to be sold because they can't keep the Legions going. I don't know how many more there are in this province and country but I think they're all in the same situation. There are fundraisers that go on at home in the community, not a rich community either, to help keep these Legions open. How many complaints or how many issues have you had about the Legions in this province?

PATRICK STOGRAN: In this province - it would be difficult for me to narrow it down to this province. I could go through our files and identify that. I think suffice to say that the younger veterans don't see the relevance of the Legion today. It's viewed by the younger veterans very much as a senior citizen type of organization. The Legion is struggling today to change that image for the veterans. They have advertised for a manager for the Dominion Command to try to change that image.

I'm going to go back on a war story. When we were in Afghanistan living in trenches in 2002, the biggest frustration of the young soldier today was not mail - that was a frustrater - it wasn't creature comforts or anything like that, it was gym equipment. They wanted their gym equipment. They had taken rolls of barbed wire and six-foot pickets to improvise the weightlifting equipment. We had jungle gyms all over the place around the trenches.

What I'm saying there is that the young person today, the complaints I get is that the Legion is more interested in darts tournaments and those kinds of things than the things that interest young troops, things like the Soldier On program. It is within the Canadian Forces, it was started by a warrant officer, but it's basically a Paralympics type of organization for wounded and injured Canadian Forces people. I've heard from

veterans that that has saved their life, a double amputee who said to get that social engagement and to be able to play sports again has been hugely beneficial to him.

I think the uniform for the Legion today, the young Legionnaires, is not a blue blazer and a beret, it's Columbia sportswear and Oakley sunglasses. I think that's the major concern amongst veterans, that it is for a different era. If they want a drink, they'll go downtown and drink, where all the young ladies are. There's all sorts of those things. They're looking for the outdoor challenges.

There have been some pilot programs, Outward Bound kind of things, that have been hugely therapeutic for stress sufferers. I think that's the major complaint, that the Legion has not kept pace with the times. It is a tremendous organization. What the young veterans don't understand is things like the Poppy Fund, the crisis funds that are available for veterans who run into financial hardship and the service officers and those kinds of things. Unfortunately, while they do have their association on Facebook, if we don't support the Legion those critical resources are going to disappear.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: Colonel Stogran, if I may, first I'd just like to respond to the critical clarity and incisiveness of what you've said in your presentation, just by shaking your hand.

I would like to ask your thoughts about one particular issue related to support for families of veterans of Afghanistan. I am, by vocation, a minister of the United Church and like many MLAs and many padres, have been in a situation of walking with families of those who have been lost in Afghanistan during the period after the loss and observing the kind of support that is made available to the families through the military. It has been my observation, at least from my own experience, that there seems to be a great support available for transporting persons to observances.

An enormous amount of resources are available at the time when the soldier is lost in Afghanistan, for transporting many members of a family to Trenton, to Toronto, then for later observances, sometimes to Gaagetown. We've seen last week the program - I've forgotten its exact name - under which families are taken to Afghanistan and so on. It seems there is a great strength there, although there are many weaknesses in terms of dealing with ongoing support, especially ongoing kinds of support with financial dimensions, some of which might not fit readily into programs or policies of the type that my colleague spoke about, where child care and support had to be transferred to grandparents and so on.

Because of this disjuncture it has occurred to me that we are in the situation with the families of our lost Afghan veterans that our military is not as good at providing the

real necessary ongoing supports as it is at providing occasions in which families may be used - and I don't like to use such a crass word but I feel this is the situation - support for occasions in which families may be used as props for the promotion of the foreign policy of the federal government. In your view, is this a reasonable construction?

PATRICK STOGRAN: Not being someone to tell it like it is, you know in recent months, days, weeks, the Canadian Forces has demonstrated its ability to turn on a dime and introduce programs to try to improve the treatment of wounded personnel. I think we've come a long way. When I was growing up as an officer, we just thought about total war. General MacKenzie would say that, peacekeeping was a sideline, we were focused on combat operations, NATO. Our doctrine was to push the refugees off the road because we're closing with the Soviet Union.

Since 2002, the Canadian Forces has come a long way in making the treatment of collateral casualties, the families, a whole lot more personal. Now, having said that, I think it is also the flavour of the day and I don't know how much institutional resolve there is to actually commit to enduring change to fix those kinds of things, which is the reason why I've been very vocal that Veterans Affairs should not come under the Canadian Forces - there has been talk about it becoming another branch of the Canadian Forces - because at the end of the day the Canadian Forces' focus is operations.

As I say, they've come a long way in the way they've treated - back in 2002, when we had our friendly fire incident, there were no systems in place for the family. We stitched it together, based on my rear party and some folks at NDHQ who knew there was a need there, and we started developing these things because we were fixated on being part of a nation at war, so we thought those things would come around. Veterans Affairs should be taking on that role in the community, they should be much more personal.

There seems to be a reticence, not only amongst bureaucrats but certainly senior military officers, too, to become personal and to take a little bit of risk, they want policies that can dictate where the dollars are going to go. No, I think you have to have the front-line workers, the padres engaged, and they should have access to these funds on a needs basis.

I've got enough faith in the system to think that the money that we would save in terms of all of these oversight groups, so many decisions are made by bureaucrats in Charlottetown, if the front-line operators were empowered to make the decision, expend the cash and go where the compassion requires them to go. I think for the money that they might waste in making these programs much more personal would not even come near the amount of money that we're paying to have central oversight by central agencies and head office in Charlottetown.

I think the Canadian Forces has come a long way, but as a huge institution focused on operations, they're never going to be there. Veterans Affairs' sole raison d'être is to provide those kinds of services.



THE CHAIR: Ms. Raymond.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Thank you very much, Colonel Stogran and I apologize for having missed the formal part of your presentation, but it's very obvious from what I've read and from obviously just your responses to questions that your dedication and candour are very important to us, as to the nation at large about these issues.

I have to say I come of a generation, the ages of my parents and so on, which it just so happened that there were not veterans really in my direct family, so this is a little bit foreign to my experience. The one thing that I have become aware of is it seems that an increasing number of the casualties, the real damage of today's veterans, does take place in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder. I know there have been sort of a long line of attitudes toward it, from the moral weakness of the early views of post-traumatic stress disorder, through to battle fatigue and so on, to the acceptance that it is something which does take place. A lot of what you're talking about seems to be - there seems to be post-traumatic stress disorder which results from things that happen while people are in the Forces, but it also sounds as though there's a great deal of stress resulting from departing from the Forces.

What I'm wondering is, so much attention is paid to preventing, justifiably, physical injury to the troops while they're in the field, I'm just wondering what attention is paid? How do you think that the Forces could be dealing with ameliorating, even preventing, these kinds of stresses, both stress from the field and stress from leaving the world of the Forces? Is there anything that could be done, should be done at the time, before people become veterans?

[10:30 a.m.]

PATRICK STOGRAN: Ma'am, you bring up a very good point and one of the ways I've marginalized myself while I was in the Canadian Forces is that not enough is done in terms of stress. I refer to it as stress inoculation and stress management. We're very quick, I'm a PTSD sufferer - I haven't really suffered, it has been my wife who has suffered. Like I said, life to me was a battle drill and my wife is quite sure that I picked up my bad habits, if you will, post-Bosnia. When I say bad habits, binge drinking, sleep disorders, I carried that, attention deficit, anger management, there's all sorts of things.

I was not diagnosed until I came back from Afghanistan, so suffice to say that I believe it is manageable. The only reason my condition was diagnosed was because we thought I had a sleep disorder, sleep apnea or something like that. I went for sleep tests and one thing led to another and they found out I was a real mess. When I mention that I've been diagnosed with PTSD, people all of a sudden treat me as an invalid. I mentioned it to a classmate of mine, Walt Natynczyk is a CDS, so I mentioned it in passing because there's no stigma to it, I think it's a battle honour. You could see his face change, oh, Pat, are you okay?

All I have to say is I believe that you cannot send somebody overseas and not expect they're going to be a changed person, and not only sending them into combat operations, but so-called peacekeeping operations which were considered a bloodless offering, so we don't have to treat them as veterans in the truest sense, emergency response in terms of the DART going to Haiti or the Pakistan earthquakes or the tsunami in Sri Lanka, they come back changed people. I think you can manage change for the better. You're not an invalid. I flail in my sleep, that's why I say my wife is a bigger sufferer than I am because she encounters that.

Stress inoculation, I experienced it as a young kid. I can remember the first time my father had me kill a duck and it was a traumatic experience, but do you know what? I grew up hunting and I'm not traumatized by that anymore. With my psychiatrist and my therapist, who are still in the Canadian Forces, I've had these rants. My rant always goes around to we issue them a helmet and body armour but by not trying to inoculate them for stress, we're abrogating our responsibility.

The medical community is making tons of money treating stress - this is so passionate to me - and they will dismiss the idea of stress inoculation. My therapist was visiting the First Special Service Force reunion this summer in Calgary - I just heard this Wednesday - and she said, your talk about stress inoculation is starting to make more sense because they were relating to her that people who had fought in other campaigns prior to coming to the First Special Service Force, they were less likely to become stress casualties than the people who they just brought in and recruited and put into the front lines. So the community is coming around to it.

When I was in Afghanistan in the early days it was like World War II, light discipline, noise discipline, sleeping in a trench with your rifle loaded. I remember thinking to myself, wow, if I came back a mess from Bosnia, I can imagine what I'm going to be like after this. I went to my American colleagues, the U.S. Army and I said, what do you guys do to prevent stress injuries and they said, prevent stress injuries? It wasn't thought of. I went to my colleagues in the U.S. Marines and they said, stress injuries? The Marine Corps doesn't have stress injuries. Now that's laughable, of course, but I take everything at face value and tried to reverse engineer his claim. If there was anything different about marines from the U.S. Army is that after they do an operation they don't get on an aircraft and end up at home eight hours later. They steam back with a ship and they might be with their unit for six weeks after a confrontation before they're back home.

I thought back to World War II and how long it took our troops to come home, so we introduced third location decompression. I had to fight city hall, the chain of command thought I was just trying to take advantage of the system, the padres, the medical community, there's no scientific evidence to suggest that a cooling off period is advantageous. I had to fight the families, my wife was under fire from the wives and the soldiers wanted to get home. I finally said to them, folks, we're either doing third location

decompression in Guam in the five-star hotels that we managed to get out of the system or we're going to do it here in our tents, here in Kandahar, but there's going to be a cooling-off period. To a person, everybody was unanimous, wives, partners and service personnel, that it was hugely beneficial, that they came back with a different frame of mind.

Even to this day, the medical community will challenge me. I was at a mental health conference and they said, well, third location decompression, they're still having PTSD, there are still these manifestations. Well, it's not a silver bullet, it's about stress management over the long term. It's about realistic training, not just in terms of laser engagement simulators that you can count the casualties, but having dismembered body parts and they use virtual reality now to bring people back to the stressful moments where they endured their traumatic injury. I used to challenge the system: why aren't we using virtual reality to put them into it in the first place, witness the dismemberment, their buddy being blown apart or somebody that they've killed? We're starting to come around to that now.

The reason why I go into these huge tirades is we're not doing it fast enough. It should be, I believe, and I've presented this to my minister, that the Canadian Forces should be putting a full-court press on stress inoculation and stress management. A person is an invalid only as a last resort and Veterans Affairs should be focusing on treatment.

MICHELE RAYMOND: So stress inoculation really would be what you would recommend, sort of the longer term. Is it known to help with the longer term results?

PATRICK STOGRAN: The jury is out on that.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Sort of outside of the Forces, I guess.

PATRICK STOGRAN: Yes, you know the problem is that there is no sort of central effort to be collecting any kind of data. I would say personally that in my experience the anecdotal evidence is very strong.

MICHELE RAYMOND: Okay. As I say, there are the two: there is the stress of being in the Forces and then there's also that stress of being out of the Forces. It sounds as though your third location decompression probably deals a bit with both of those, so I would be interested to know more as it comes on. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr. Clarke.

CECIL CLARKE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to continue because we had talked about peacekeepers and as you indicate in a few other references, Colonel Stogran, that it's kind of that grey area where I know folks just from the local Legion that were actively involved, that were peacekeepers in regular forces but then peacekeepers over in Cyprus and everyone thought the weather was nice but not recognizing bullets

were flying overhead and actually hurting people and in very intense situations of what people look at it versus the intended purpose of what peacekeeping is supposed to be versus all-out war.

In terms of the perils or the impact, there's probably very little separation in some cases. One of the things - and the reason I mentioned Mel Birmingham, having been a peace officer who served and finding it very difficult because of the impact on the person while in service and I guess in terms of the fairness of treatment because they were no less a colleague at the front line, yet, as you say, when you come back there's a difference.

I also know that, even when I think in this case of Cape Breton, the Cape Breton Regional Police Service I think has the highest per capita number of officers who have served or are serving in peacekeeping missions. They themselves, as a municipal police service, continue in good numbers to serve and I know during the Year of the Veteran we were able to host them and recognize. It was a very young profile, which is the other thing. These were young faces, considered to be young and one often doesn't know, when they're young, where problems may come in the future and what was the root cause of those problems and oftentimes it can be while they were in service.

In one way, in terms of advocating, and I'm a strong advocate of Mel's position but also of anybody who would take the call for service for their nation and put themselves in harm's way, that they should be treated in a different way, in a sense, but yet treated equally. I'm wondering, with your experience and with your knowledge of the peacekeepers you've come in contact with, such as Mel and others who are out there, and I know even at home in Cape Breton when I look at my uncle, who was in the Highlanders and then involved with peacekeeping and those different relationships, they all advocate for one another, but their circumstances are different so their needs become different.

I think that's part of this systemic problem of a system that my colleague, Mr. Theriault, talked about where a \$10,000 lift can go in but \$200 shoes don't fit a policy. I think that's a challenge in terms of what has to change because I know money is going in and money increasingly goes in but we still have systemic challenges and there has to be a recognition.

For peacekeepers who have served, I guess peace officers specifically, when they're doing that, are there any types of recommendations that you have been able to make to suggest to the Government of Canada on behalf of people like Mel?

PATRICK STOGRAN: Any recommendations that we've made? No, I'll say that. It's a complex piece of the puzzle and I say that because in terms of my mandate, I've said that this office was set up to fail. The bureaucracy did not want a Veterans Ombudsman. They call it a Veterans Ombudsman but they created a complaints manager for Veterans Affairs Canada. Although the RCMP are included as a throwaway phrase as

veterans, by the letter of my mandate I'm only to get involved with police issues insofar as the administration on behalf of VAC. So I've expanded that role by working with the RCMP over the last three years to demonstrate to them how, as the Veterans Ombudsman, I can actually provide their system a service.

This issue of the non-RCMP members, that's certainly on the agenda and I've been very vocal about it but we haven't had the resources or, indeed, the mandate to go into that field. But they are every bit a casualty as any Canadian Forces or RCMP member.

It was brought up by one of the honourable members here, the aftermath. To me, my experiences in Bosnia and Afghanistan were hugely self-actualizing. I will go back to Afghanistan as soon as I possibly can. The only reason I got out of the Canadian Forces is because General Hillier said: you'll get promoted, a great career and all that, but you're not going to command troops again. I want to go back into operations. To me, the most traumatic piece of my disability was coming back, coming back to the system, the bureaucracy that I faced after Bosnia. My story is very complex. I was involved in some incidents there that at the time I was criticized for but I've since been vindicated. But the aftermath, to me, was more debilitating.

Post-Afghanistan, the bureaucratic managerial way that we were walking back into Afghanistan in 2006 was hugely frustrating for me and hugely debilitating. So you take a person like Mel Birmingham who soldiered alongside people in Kosovo and had done the hard yards, put his life on the line, was not in any way prepared for it. I've worked with RCMP in Bosnia who had been in gunfights and chased people down in high-speed chases and we were getting shelled in a place called Plaški, Croatia, and I've never seen policemen as frightened. For me, I'd been stress inoculated. We've had explosions, we've had mortar fire called in on us to experience that. They weren't prepared for it.

Mel Birmingham went off to war in 1998, I believe, in Kosovo and he was thrown back into a system that can't relate to him. These veterans don't ask for much, in many cases. I had one veteran, 89-years old, an ex-physical training instructor with the Army - I'm sure he's dead now - but he called me in my early days. He was in tears on the phone, he just wanted somebody in the system to say that he wasn't a liar. He'd been living with that by trying to - you know, simple things like hearing aids.

I had a letter from a veteran, a World War II bomber pilot, he was in tears. He had suffered a stroke five months before our meeting and he had a letter from his audiologist saying that the stroke had caused severe degradation in his hearing, he needed new hearing aids. Veterans Affairs wouldn't provide it. I almost felt like taking my charge card out and giving it to this person. Those are the kinds of debilitating things that eat away at the soul of somebody who has just accepted the call and gone overseas.

There are so many policemen out there - I wasn't aware of the statistics to do with

Cape Breton, but I know there are some members of the Sûreté du Québec who were basically told, hey, you volunteered to go over there, don't look to us for benefits. So many of the problems that soldiers encounter manifest themselves 10, 15, 20 years after they get back. I apologize for the outburst but you touched on a very important issue there.

[10:45 a.m.]

CECIL CLARKE: There's one other aspect because I know, as they say, sometimes the first is worst. When you're the first in to take over and to take on an assignment, it is never without challenge because you get to face for the first time both what your mandate is anticipated to be and then there's the reality of what it becomes.

Having been a former Speaker of the House, dealing with the Ombudsman's Office on the neutrality side, to see and work with the Ombudsman's Office and to recognize the objectivity of it, versus being in a role as a Cabinet minister and having to find that sometimes what you hear is not always easy to hear but it's necessary, then being in Opposition and dealing with the front-line issues, you get a full sense of where things are.

I'm glad to hear that you're putting together your report. I guess one of the things, as you look at lessons learned and, more importantly, recommendations that hopefully will strengthen and help the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman to evolve. That's one of the things we've always looked at, where are the next steps in continuing this? You are at the front end of a process that's identified probably to allot the recognition and the need. When you look at the statistics you've provided and the amount of activity in terms of case files and travel and engagement, I would say that is a lot within a short period of time. Like all of us, we can't do everything, but we can objectively set out to improve where things are.

I'm hoping that with your recommendations - I know my initial question was if there are specific things about what policy is totally out of sync, and I know you've referenced lump sums, but where are the things that there's commonality from those 4,000-plus files, or the consultations? What in the system, from a policy program point of view, needs to change that improves the outcomes for veterans, regardless of new or old, and what is going to provide a greater basis so that the role of the Ombudsman truly becomes that - not a referee, but in dealing with the reason for its establishment.

I'm hoping in your report that there will be some stuff that says this policy doesn't work, and this is how we think it doesn't and why. I don't know if that's part of what you're dealing with because as we go forward and time being what it is from the reality where we are - I know Mr. MacMaster and I were chatting - the future veterans, as you know, we talk about Legions, but bricks and mortar and facilities of that nature are unfortunately quickly becoming less and less. As you say, Facebook and other means of communicating and interacting with constituent groups are going to have to be a new

reality that we focus on and that should be something we have to address, as well, how do you communicate with many different needs, varying needs and very distinct needs?

I'm wondering, in your recommendations, will you be talking about specific and I would say constructive - and it may be constructive criticism of where the system is, because we often say, well, the senior bureaucrats don't get this, but what is there? I know with the program officer in Sydney, when dealing with a veteran, they're very sincere, but they can only go off of - as Junior was saying - the list of what's allowable and then it goes through this other complicated process.

I would hope that as a result of this experience nothing is in vain, it is the start of something and it's not always an easy start, as you've found out. I'm hoping that from a provincial point of view that we as legislators here can advocate to our federal counterparts - and we've always been strong advocates in a constructive way - of what we do next. So I'm hoping your recommendations may be very specific, that those program policy things will maybe be identified more clearly, because it's more helpful to do that than someone's not co-operating.

PATRICK STOGRAN: The first comment I'd make is regarding the VAC employees. A lot of people have said, we have to get rid of the civilians, we have to get more veterans in there. I'm not an advocate of that, veterans are very good at following orders also. What is broken with the system is the system. One of my best sources of intelligence in terms of what's wrong with the system is VAC employees who are frustrated, the people who are in the district offices who have to deal with the veteran and the bureaucracy. They're caught between a rock and a hard place and they're very frustrated by it.

In terms of being constructive, we have identified the issues for the department, we have been very open. My approach as Ombudsman has been one of public consultation, unlike many Ombudsmen who will do administrative reviews where they keep all of the evidence close to their chest and publish a report at the end of the day with this many recommendations on what should be done.

As soon as we're building a case, we submit to the department what we call observations, where these are the facts according to the veterans, and we're trying to encourage the system to engage and either tell us why the problem exists, from your perspective as a bureaucrat, or fix it. We've been going on about that.

The biggest recommendation I'm making as I leave this office - I believe in an Office of the Ombudsman. It's not about big press releases and those kinds of things - I found that press conference particularly distasteful, but something I had to do because the office was set up to fail. The single recommendation that I am really going to press home - and I promised veterans on August 17<sup>th</sup> when I did that press conference I would do it - is that the system is broken, the system is corrupt, it's scandalous, it cheats veterans. I can't say that more emphatically, I've got lists of evidence from veterans. The burden of

proof has been elevated much higher than the legislation ever intended.

I mentioned in here “the liberally construed and interpreted” - that’s a preamble to virtually all of the Acts, short of the New Veterans Charter - and the interpretations of the Acts that are on file are anything but liberal. The benefit of the doubt has been interpreted as balance of probability, a far higher burden of proof. The violations of natural justice are all over the place in terms of - the Veterans Review and Appeal Board do not publish their decisions, so a veteran has no idea if their case fits in with somebody else. They practise undue influence; in other words, decisions are controlled by head office. The administration here in Halifax can’t make decisions, they send it all to Charlottetown.

I’m starting to get passionate here, that system really has to be addressed and I think the individual problems will look after themselves.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. You’re starting to get passionate - I think that you have been passionate throughout the entire exchange here this morning. I have to say that this is one of the most candid and frank exchanges that we have had within this committee. I do have a number of questions for you personally, but as chairman I will refrain from those because we are about to run out of time.

We appreciate the opportunity to have this on Legislative TV, as well, and the fact that veterans out there around this province will be able to identify with you and the work that you have done for the veterans in Canada. I think this is very important because most of the Legislative TV segments are sometimes run again, and I hope that is the case with this, that it will be aired at other times as well. I hope that you will perhaps stay around for a few minutes afterwards so that we may have an opportunity to rub shoulders with you again for having come to Nova Scotia and the fact that we are the first Legislative Assembly that you have appeared before, a Veterans Affairs Committee.

Thanks to you, Colonel Patrick Stogran, and also to Ms. Colleen Soltermann, the Director of Strategic Liaison, it’s certainly an important job that you have. I think we’ll be very anxious to see what you are leaving in direction for the next Ombudsman who comes forward because I think that’s very important, as has been stressed by committee members as well. So again, thank you both for appearing before us this morning.

We just have a couple of items that we have to look after from a business perspective and we do have about six minutes in which to do that . . .

PATRICK STOGRAN: Mr. Chairman, may I just make a quick comment?

THE CHAIR: Certainly, we’ll give you an opportunity for closing remarks because this is actually more important than the business that we have before us this morning.

PATRICK STOGRAN: I just want to say, as I mentioned briefly, I found that the



need for me to do that press conference on August 17<sup>th</sup> was particularly distasteful. I don't think that an ombudsman should be an activist, but I have turned into an activist in my closing stages here. I'd like to think that this is something constructive. I have been very vocal and have made all sorts of wild allegations, and at every step of the way I have invited the system to prove me wrong. I've asked the system to prove me wrong, and as yet they've provided no evidence to the contrary.

All I have to say is I hope that what I'm doing is constructive. I'm certainly going to do my best with the office to try to maintain the professional credibility of the office. But I have to express my hugest gratitude to not only your committee and the people of Nova Scotia, but all Canadians who have rallied up and are calling our political masters to task to answer some of the tough questions. If I had another three years, none of this would have happened. I believe that I should be working within the system and you can't turn a huge bureaucracy and years of deterioration on a dime. But it's small gestures like this, so I very much thank you for opening the doors to the provincial arena as you have. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Colonel Stogran. If we could just very quickly go through our items of business. The first is a letter from the Minister of Veterans Affairs, Jean-Pierre Blackburn. In that letter we are told that the Funeral and Burial Program of Veterans Affairs Canada is delivered by the Last Post Fund, in accordance with the Veterans Burial Regulations. Also in that letter - and this is probably something that is good - a review of the Funeral and Burial Program is currently underway to ensure that the level of support provided continues to allow for a dignified funeral and burial. This, of course, was in relation to modern-day veterans. Everyone has received a copy of that, so we certainly will look for that review.

The Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, the response has been that there is not availability for someone to come before the committee, so we certainly accept that.

Committee meetings during the House session, I think we had decided earlier that we would not meet during the sitting of the House. Is that agreed? The submarine tour is set for October 21<sup>st</sup>, so we'll keep that in mind and look forward to doing that.

The next meeting date will have to be announced later on, so a motion to adjourn would be in order. Mr. Gaudet.

WAYNE GAUDET: Mr. Chairman, just before we adjourn, I was asked with regard to our submarine tour, if we would be allowed to bring one guest. I don't want to blindside anybody, but maybe if everybody agrees we could ask Kim, if committee members want to pursue this, to maybe double-check with our hosts to see if that's possible and then relay the message back to the committee members.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, I'm sure Kim will look after that for us. Is there a motion to adjourn?

WAYNE GAUDET: I so move.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, an outstanding meeting.

The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:59 a.m.]