

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Tuesday, February 18, 2020**

**Legislative Committees Office**

**Commissionaires Nova Scotia**

**Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services**

## **VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

Rafah DiCostanzo (Chair)  
Ben Jessome (Vice-Chair)  
Brendan Maguire  
Bill Horne  
Hugh MacKay  
Kim Masland  
Murray Ryan  
Lisa Roberts  
Claudia Chender

### **In Attendance:**

Judy Kavanagh  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

## **WITNESSES**

### **Commissionaires Nova Scotia**

Commander (Ret'd.) Marjorie Hickey  
Chair, Board of Governors

Commander Geoffrey Hamilton  
Chief Executive Officer

Deputy Commissioner (Ret'd.) Stephen Graham  
Vice-Chair, Board of Governors

Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel Corinne MacLellan  
Governor



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2020**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**2:00 P.M.**

CHAIR

Rafah DiCostanzo

Vice-Chair

Ben Jessome

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon and welcome. I call the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to order.

My name is Rafah DiCostanzo. I'm the MLA for Clayton Park West, and I'm the Chair. We are receiving a presentation from Commissionaires Nova Scotia today. I will start by asking the committee members to introduce themselves.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I want to say a couple of things. The washrooms are just outside in the anteroom. In case of emergency we will leave, meet on Granville Street, and proceed to Grand Parade. Hopefully we do not need to do that; it has never happened to me yet, so I'm very glad.

I ask everyone to check their phones to make sure they're on silent. If you don't mind, wait until I acknowledge your name so that the light will come on your microphone before you speak.

I welcome the presenters, if they could introduce themselves. Commander Marjorie Hickey.

COMMANDER (RET'D.): MARJORIE HICKEY: Good afternoon. It's a great pleasure to be here today to have this opportunity to discuss the role played by commissionaires who work in this province at a variety of sites in a variety of locations. We plan to tell you a bit about the kind of work that commissionaires do and to provide you with some understanding of our company, Commissionaires Nova Scotia.

My name is Marjorie Hickey. I am the current Chair of the Board of Governors of Commissionaires Nova Scotia. I'm a partner at the law firm of McInnes Cooper. I've been a lawyer in Halifax for over 35 years. I've also been a Naval Reservist for over 35 years, having served as the Commanding Officer of our local Naval Reserve Division, HMCS Scotian, among other positions.

I've been on the Board of Governors of Commissionaires Nova Scotia for over 20 years. I'm truly proud to serve with 15 other governors who come from military and RCMP backgrounds, predominantly. We also have several non-military and non-RCMP members of our board to bring the community perspective and to bring the appropriate matrix of skills to our board.

Together, our board oversees the work of the staff of Commissionaires Nova Scotia who's led by our CEO, Geoff Hamilton. I'm just going to say a few words about each of our presenters today, and then I'll turn it over to Geoff in a short moment.

Geoff Hamilton is our CEO, having joined us at Commissionaires Nova Scotia about a year and a half ago. Prior to working with us, he worked for three and a half years in Myanmar where he was the CEO of a security firm serving UN agencies. Before that he developed an agroforestry project in the South Sudan. He began his career in the Royal Canadian Navy 23 years ago and is still active in the Naval Reserve where he serves as a Commander.

To Geoff's right is Steve Graham. Steve served 38 years with the RCMP in British Columbia, Ontario, P.E.I., New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia in operations, staff, and command roles. He is the past Commanding Officer of P.E.I., New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia divisions and retired as the Deputy Commissioner responsible for RCMP Services in Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and P.E.I. He was busy. He has been a governor with Commissionaires Nova Scotia since 2011. He serves on a number of our committees and currently serves in the role of Vice-Chair of the board.

To my far right is Corinne MacLellan. She has been active in the areas of community, government, media relations, marketing, communications, corporate service, corporate engagement, public affairs, and event production for 25 years now. Corinne serves as Senior Vice-President with m5 Public Affairs and is a communications principal with Group ATN.

Corinne has maintained a diverse cross-sectoral portfolio with m5, focused on transportation, aquaculture, First Nations, and infrastructure development. She was recently appointed an honorary Lieutenant-Colonel with the Halifax Rifles by the Minister of National Defence, Harjit Singh Sajjan. She is a former in-Canada representative for the Belgian Government and Communications Advisor to the Assembly of First Nations regionally. In addition to our board, she serves on the Army Museum of Halifax Citadel's board.

We are your presenters collectively this afternoon. The plan for me is to just say a few short words at the beginning to give a bit of an overview of our company. Geoff will then follow up with greater detail that we hope will be of some interest to you. Steve and Corinne will chime in as appropriate. We're certainly open to being interrupted at any time for any questions along the way.

**THE CHAIR:** We normally have you present. Just give us some opening remarks, and then we'll pass the questioning to the PC Party, to the NDP, and then to the Liberal Party. I will be doing the list of who is asking the next question. Just do your opening remarks, and then I will take care of the rest.

**MARJORIE HICKEY:** To give you a broad overview of Commissionaires, the Corps of Commissionaires, as we call it, is really a global network of social mandate enterprises dedicated to providing meaningful employment for veterans. When we use the word "veterans," we're speaking of veterans of both military and RCMP backgrounds. The organization globally was first founded in the United Kingdom in 1859.

In Nova Scotia, it became a not-for-profit corporation incorporated by an Act of the Legislative Assembly in 1937. It's headquartered in Halifax, and as I mentioned, we have a board of governors of 16 governors. We are 100 per cent self-funded through the operations that we conduct. We are part of a broader federation. There are 15 other divisions nationwide that have similar mandates to provide meaningful employment for veterans. We are one small piece of a national organization.

I'm going to turn it over now to our CEO, Geoff Hamilton, to carry on with some further details that we hope will be of interest.

**COMMANDER GEOFFREY HAMILTON:** Thank you to the members of the committee for the invitation and allowing us to introduce ourselves a little bit. I want to start with what we call the basic facts of Commissionaires. We often end up having to dwell on the basic facts. I think it's safe to say that almost everyone knows what a commissionaire is, but not everyone knows about Commissionaires as an organization. I'm very happy to be in a room of people who are probably a little bit more familiar about our organization as a not-for-profit, but I will run through the basic facts notwithstanding.

We are the largest private security provider and the largest private employer of veterans in Nova Scotia. That's equally true of Commissionaires across the country. There are 1,400 commissionaires in Nova Scotia, part of that federation of 22,000 across Canada. Here in Nova Scotia, 64 per cent of our commissionaires are veterans. The remainder would be family members of veterans, people with specific technical backgrounds that we require to access, and often former members of police or emergency services who aren't technically speaking veterans within our mandate, but nevertheless, they are very relevant to the work that we do.

We have an 80 per cent retention rate. That's last year's number. It's traditionally a little bit higher, but that's compared to a security industry rate of about 50 per cent to 10 per cent. In fact, I can say as somebody with a background in security on the private sector side, we don't speak about retention rates; we talk about turnover rates. The turnover rate is often between 50 and 200 per cent, depending on the firm you're talking about. It's quite astonishing, so the fact that we have an 80 per cent retention rate is alarmingly good.

Here in Nova Scotia, we have \$35 million in annual gross revenue. I'll talk a little bit more about where that comes from and how our contracts are derived. You'll see a sticker there; we've just been certified again as one of Canada's Best Employers top 300 by Forbes for 2020. We've been on that list for five years now, the only security company on that list for those years.

I wanted to talk a little bit about the sort of veterans that we help. I think there exists in folks' minds a stereotype of sorts about what a commissionaire is and what their background is. From the perspective of someone who has joined and has learned about the organization a lot over the last couple of years, I wanted to sort of share the range of veteran we support.

I would say that the traditional career path, if you will, of a commissionaire in the past - perhaps up until about 10 years ago - was the pension bridge veteran. There was a real career path of folks who would join the military, serve for 20 years, and they would get a 40 per cent pension. It wasn't enough to live on, but enough that they could return to their home communities of Springhill or Yarmouth or wherever they were from where there wasn't a military presence, go back to their families and work with Commissionaires. They would make enough money to top up their pension until they reached the age of 65, when CPP and OAS would kick in, and they could retire in financial security.

Often many of those folks would continue to work for us at that point, and that's when we bleed into the next category: the not-ready-to-retire veterans. The folks who are financially secure, they've made all their arrangements, the house is paid off, and they're ready to go. They try it for six months and it just doesn't stick. We got a lot of failed retirees working in the Corps of Commissionaires. They're our bread and butter.

I would say these folks really make the organization what it is. They could not stop working if they tried. They, in fact, have tried and could not stop working, so they come back to us. What they're looking for in the Commissionaires is a sense of community, a sense of purpose like what they had when they were in the military or the police, and a familiar work environment with colleagues who are familiar to them.

We do, of course, have certain commissionaires who are veterans in financial need, folks who may have served for only four or five years and, for whatever reason, chose not to stay in the military long enough to get a pension. They had tried different jobs over the course of their lives. As anyone who's been in the military can attest to, once you've been uprooted and begun the path of moving around and being posted, it's hard to kind of get landed anywhere again. It's hard to get a root. Some folks find themselves late in life without a pension or financial ability to retire. It's difficult to find work as an older person in the workforce, and we provide a place for them as well.

I think that's probably the type of veteran a lot of folks have in mind when they think of commissionaires. I can attest that that's actually a relative minority of the workforce that we have. We are seeing an increasing number of these so-called second career veterans. These are folks who are, I suppose, kind of like the previous category, but these are the ones who are just leaving the military. They've done their five or 10 years, and they don't have a pension.

What they're looking for is another job where they can set themselves up for retirement, make some money, and really start a second career, so we're trying to adapt as an organization to provide opportunities for these second career veterans. We'll talk a little bit later about the sort of business lines we offer that are trying to appeal to that audience.

We do, of course, have some folks who are medically accommodated either through operational stress injuries like PTSD or physical disabilities. As an example, we have a chap who works with us at the Halifax Harbour Bridges who has a service dog, Thunder, who works with him. He's one of our managers there and is fantastic within that accommodation; he's exactly what we want. A lot of security companies, in particular, but employers in general, are often reluctant to provide employment for folks who are accommodated by a service dog.

Family is an increasing area of focus for us. In fact, it's a discussion currently within our national mandate, whether that should include family of veterans specifically and family of serving service members. Often folks who are in the military and being posted around the country every three or six years, there's what we in the military used to call a trailing spouse. That trailing spouse is having to quit and find a job every three or six years. It's very difficult. Wherever there's a base and where there's military, there's also commissionaires. We want to be able to provide support for them, as well, and do, in many cases.

I mentioned a little bit about our contracts before. We are, as Marjorie mentioned, 100 per cent self-funded through our operations, which makes us sort of an unusual not-for-profit organization. We do no fundraising, and we issue no charitable receipts. We just negotiate contracts with our clients and operate at a not-for-profit basis with our revenue of \$35 million.

The federal right of first refusal, as it's called, accommodates about half of that: 49 per cent. The right of first refusal is our arrangement with the federal government. It has been in existence for many decades. It essentially gives Commissionaires as an organization the right to have a first say on whether or not they take work under a National Master Standing Offer to do security services for the federal government.

[2:15 p.m.]

It's through a rate structure that's very transparent, thoroughly negotiated by the Treasury Board and PSPC every year. We open our books in excruciating detail. We're going through it right now, if I sound pained by that, but it is a very thorough process. They make sure that through this arrangement we're not operating at a profit and we're not subsidizing the commercial work that we compete with, two things the federal government is very sensitive to, for obvious reasons. That accounts for about half of what we do in Nova Scotia. The remainder is all contracted through commercial procurement processes, including the work we do for the province.

Guarding contracts can be long-term contracts, they can be seasonal. We do a lot of seasonal work at the Halifax Port Authority in support of the cruise ships, for example, at the national parks, or short term. We do quite a volume of short-term work, whether it's in response to events or contractor escorts and similar work. We do a full range of guarding work.

As the next slide can speak to, we actually provide a lot of services outside of what you might consider to be stereotypical or traditional commissionaires' work. The first square there, Security Solutions, kind of speaks to what people have in mind when they say "commissionaire." That is access control, security rounds - it runs the whole gamut really, because some of the work we do is use-of-force work where the person is not armed exactly, but ready to defend themselves. That's in support of the federal courts and some other sensitive areas. Also, the traditional commissionaires fall in that field.

Fingerprinting and identification services are a relatively new service that has been rolled out over the last few years. We do have a retail outlet just down the road on Barrington Street, opposite Scotia Square, that perhaps you'll see the signage for soon. We've just moved there. We can provide criminal record checks, fingerprinting, passport photos, and all the services to support issuance of identification.



We have some national clients for that as well, some large national employers who contract with us to do all that background processing and screening pre-employment and then to issue actual identification cards on behalf of the employer.

Investigations and support to law enforcement is a really growing area for us. It's an area, in fact, that we've pioneered across the country. At Halifax Regional Police, we have 40 commissionaires working there, and the police themselves are very happy to say that everything that happens in that building that doesn't require a badge or a gun or both is done by a commissionaire. A lot of administrative back-end support - everything from processing remands and issuing summons - is done by commissionaires there, including criminal record checks.

The investigations capability is one that we're doing an increasing amount of now for private investigations, internal investigations, and we hope to be able to do some investigations in support of police complaint commissions and similar public bodies that require a trusted third-party organization to conduct investigations for them. Perhaps we'll call on Deputy Commissioner Graham to speak to that because, as a former RCMP member, he does have a fair amount of knowledge in that specific area.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER (RET'D.) STEPHEN GRAHAM: Thank you for that, Geoff. Certainly, non-corps policing - all police services in the country - is a very expensive enterprise. It requires a high skill set, but there are certain areas within it that different approaches can be taken which are cost effective and appropriate. It can run the gamut from things like a crime scene, protecting a crime scene for an extended period of time while investigators continue to do their work and so on, so providing that kind of security.

We have a contract in Atlantic Canada for detention guards and services for all the cell blocks across the province to provide that kind of support and work. We have dispatch in some locations. Certainly, escort site access by law enforcement is possible, parking enforcement, all of those things beyond just - I shouldn't say beyond just investigation, but there are a lot of areas that would take pressure off police services. We feel we have a very good skill set and a great group of people that could support that kind of work.

THE CHAIR: Ms. MacLellan, would you like to add something?

HONORARY LIEUTENANT-COLONEL CORINNE MACLELLAN: I was going to say sinkhole security as well.

THE CHAIR: Okay, we'll open it for questions.

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: Sorry, I had some other comments.

THE CHAIR: I apologize. Mr. Hamilton.

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: I apologize for starting the volleyball at this end of the table. I just wanted to have somebody speak to that who has a little bit more experience in policing specifically than I do.

The key with all of these service areas that we're diversifying in - we call these diversification areas, the ones that aren't traditionally Commissionaires. That includes training. We do a lot of first aid training, an increasing amount. Those relate very closely to trades and skills that are acquired by folks in the military and the RCMP in the course of their service. We're trying to provide higher paying work that speaks to those skills.

This is a quick map of where we work. Those red dots are the sites where Commissionaires are providing security across the province. The next slide is where we live. Obviously, there's a fair amount of overlap. The point I want to make with this slide in particular is that although where we work is often in urban areas, as you can see, quite a bit around HRM in particular, where we live tends to be in rural areas. That speaks to the extent to which Commissionaires is an organization that is supporting rural areas and rural economies even though the work is often contracted in the cities themselves.

Again, that's an effect of our veterans. When they leave the military and they move home, they really want to move home. They want to move back to where they're from. We provide work that allows them to do that.

Having introduced the basic facts first, which I suppose you were all familiar with, these are the surprising ones, which I suppose many people would not be inclined to think. At the top of the list is a common misperception: 50 per cent of our commissionaires are below the ordinary age of retirement. In fact, the bulk of our workforce is between the age of 45 and 65. Twenty-one per cent are female, which doesn't sound like an incredible statistic except when you compare it to our feedstock of releasing Armed Forces members, who tend to be about 14 per cent female. The security industry writ large tends to be closer to 12 per cent. We are a standout in that category.

We are accommodating, as I mentioned, 13 per cent of our workforce with an accommodated disability of some sort, obviously in jobs that allow for those disabilities to be accommodated. Thirteen per cent of our workforce is Indigenous, which is a surprising one to us, but I suppose not so much when you consider how many of our employees work in rural areas. That compares to only about 3 per cent of the Nova Scotia workforce.

We have done an economic impact assessment, had one commissioned by Group ATN. We wanted to know what the tangible impact is of Commissionaires Nova Scotia. We really wanted to avoid having one of these pie-in-the-sky economic impacts - for every dollar spent, you could send a man to the moon, that sort of thing. It was conducted actuarially by an economist who worked very closely with the province.

The finding is surprising, though. Because we're based in Nova Scotia and because we're not-for-profit, for every dollar contracted with us, we generate about 20 per cent more provincial tax revenue, create 18 per cent more employment for Nova Scotians, and increase household incomes of our employees by 19 per cent as compared to a non-Nova Scotian or a for-profit security company.

The last point - I wanted to add on to what I mentioned earlier about those folks who work for us who are not ready to retire. In almost all cases, we find that those are folks who are happy to work for Commissionaires who wouldn't typically work for any other security company. The impact of that is twofold. On the one hand, we find that when, for example, we lose a competitive tender, and the private sector companies are able to badge over - they generally expect to be able to badge over the workforce, as they call it. They just go in and recruit the guys who are working there now. They expect to be able to do about 80 per cent of a badge-over rate.

When it comes to Commissionaires, the industry is aware that the badge-over rate is typically more like 20 per cent because a good chunk of that workforce doesn't really want to do anything else for any other organization. The net effect of that is that we really do grow the workforce of Nova Scotia. When you look at the number of employees we have, the number that could be financially retired, the number that would not otherwise choose to work if they weren't with Commissionaires, and you aggregate that across the whole Nova Scotia workforce, about 0.1 per cent of the Nova Scotia workforce is effectively commissionaires who could otherwise retire. When you think about it, that is a pretty considerable and surprising number.

Some of the challenges we're facing now - I have already spoken to the changing needs of veterans, the changing types of veterans we're trying to serve, and the diversification we're trying to do to be able to reach them.

Supporting veterans in specific rural areas is a big focus for us. If you look at the Where We Work and Where We Live slides, there were a couple of gaps - the South Shore, in particular, and around Guysborough County - where we don't have a presence and where we would like to be able to provide work for veterans in those areas. We know there are veterans there who would be perfectly happy to work for us, and we want to be able to serve them.

The federal right of first refusal that I mentioned earlier is a process that gets renewed on a 10-year basis. We're sort of at the end of that 10 years now, and we're going through that process now. It is a challenge for us to do that, because anyone in the security industry on the private sector side would like to think that they should get a piece of that work, so the government comes under a lot of lobbying. We need to stay ahead of that, as well, and continuously demonstrate our value as a not-for-profit partner.

We need to stay ahead of the minimum wage. We're happy to see that the minimum wage was increased recently to go up a dollar. That's fantastic. What that should translate to in our ideal world is that all of our commissionaires' wages go up a dollar. It's a little bit more complicated than that, because we are dealing with over 200 separately negotiated commercial contracts. We have to go around and stay ahead of that, including with the province. That's a challenge for us at the moment.

Workers' Compensation is a challenge for everyone for reasons that I don't think I need to bore anyone with here. I don't want to turn this into a complaint session about WCB, because they provide a valuable service. We are aware that competitors based outside of Nova Scotia are able to come in and bid on work against us and do not have to fall under the WCB regime. This means, in effect, they get a three to three and a half per cent budget advantage over us, which is a real problem for us.

This is my last slide, I swear. These are the initiatives we're working on at the moment. Engagement with the Nova Scotia Health Authority is a big one for us. We formerly did a lot of work with hospitals in Nova Scotia when the separate district authorities were pre-amalgamated. You've probably seen a lot of coverage recently about security issues around health care in Nova Scotia. Those weren't stories you saw five years ago, and I'll let you draw your own conclusions about why that may be.

Now that there's new leadership at the NSHA, we're able to begin grassroots discussions with folks at the hospitals themselves - the facility managers - about being able to provide them with the services they feel they need. We'll be engaging soon with the new CEO, Brendan Carr, as well.

We're looking at a commercial occupational long-term disability insurance program as an alternative to WCB. We are voluntary participants in that program. We see that a commercial program of long-term disability and occupational insurance would provide better value for our commissionaires. Effectively, it would insure them against any type of injury or sickness or illness, not just work-related ones, at no additional cost the way the numbers break out in comparison to the WCB. That's something we're working on very closely, including with our partners in the province because it is, at the moment, a specific contractor requirement that would be with WCB. We're hoping to have our program assessed and reviewed and be signed off as an effective alternative.

We're delivering those new service lines that we discussed earlier: ID services, non-core policing, and investigations. We're working with the province on how we can provide those services to them, as well, certainly engaging all of our clients right now with the recent change to minimum wage and how that should impact the wages of their commissionaires under contract.

We're working with staff at the provincial level to seek some clarification on the provision in the Nova Scotia procurement manual that allows sole sourcing to not-for-profits. The practice within the Public Services do not use that provision except under sort

of extraordinary circumstances. It's not really clear to anyone we have spoken to as to what those circumstances are or who makes the decision. We would like to suggest that we should be one of those circumstances. We are continuing those discussions.

I suppose more generally about social mandate preferences, there is, in the Public Service Commission, an explicit preference for hiring of veterans. We'd like to suggest there should be specific preference for contracting with veteran-supporting organizations as a sort of social mandate enterprise basis. We'd like to see more weighting and technical scoring of RFPs, in particular, that address that area.

Those are some areas that we're currently in discussions with. That is my last slide, Madam Chair. Thank you for your patience. I know that was more than five minutes, at least I suspect.

THE CHAIR: I think you gave us wonderful information, and I look forward to the questions from my colleagues. We will start the questions with the PC Party. We normally have a question and a follow-up with it, and then we move on to the NDP and then the Liberals. We'll go in a circle until about 3:45 p.m., when we will ask you to give your final remarks, and then we will do the business for the committee after that.

We will start with Ms. Masland.

[2:30 p.m.]

KIM MASLAND: Thank you for that wonderful presentation. I know I speak for myself and colleagues when we say how fortunate we are at the Legislature to have those great men and women who protect the House and protect us every day. They're extremely professional, wonderful people. We're very fortunate to have them there.

When you spoke of the family connection, which veterans do we help, I have a connection to that, too, because my daughter was a commissionaire when she followed her RCMP husband to the North. It's wonderful, wonderful work you folks are doing.

You mentioned in your presentation that 64 per cent of the employees are veterans. Have you had any difficulties in hiring veterans, especially now when you're looking at all the diversification? Are you having any difficulty in hiring veterans?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: Obviously, we have to remain attractive to veterans as an employer. That's one of our strategic goals, not just to be an employer, but an employer of choice, of sorts, for veterans. What that comes down to is being able to provide work that's appealing to them. That traditional audience is - I don't want to say dying off, but that traditional type of veteran is less common these days. We're seeing younger ones, and that's what the diversification initiative is all about. In terms of whether we're having trouble, it's something we're constantly seized with, but I think you would find that 64 per cent number, at least in Nova Scotia, has been steady for the last few years.

KIM MASLAND: The last time your organization presented to our committee, your goal was to increase contracts in health care, marine, and energy security services in Nova Scotia, as well as becoming the choice for non-core policing services and security training in Nova Scotia. How successful do you feel you folks have been in that?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: We don't have the hospital contract, which was one. The discussions at the last committee meeting, it was up in the air about how that was going to be contracted. In the end, it was one big RFP for the whole province - not a perfect RFP. I would suggest it didn't necessarily weight experience and capacity to deliver or was not inquisitive about the ability of the provider selected to deliver at the pay rates they were proposing. That has led to a lot of the current trouble that we're seeing. We have been unsuccessful in that, and our hope is to become successful in it by engaging the NSHA now that there has been some reorganization there.

On the marine side, we're doing very well actually. We do a lot of work with the Halifax Port Authority and in Ceres, NuStar terminal. We do quite a bit of marine work at the moment that we're quite happy with.

The last one on that list is the energy sector. Obviously, there have been some twists and turns in the energy sector in the last couple of years. We're still very well positioned. In fact, this is one of the red dots that didn't appear on the Where We Work slide because it's a relatively recent addition. We're doing some work with ExxonMobil at their site in Guysborough County. There's a lot of other activity related to energy in Guysborough County that we're keeping our eyes on, for sure.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the NDP. Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: Thanks very much for the presentation. Because we are the Veterans Affairs Committee, we don't typically include RCMP veterans in our definition of veterans. I'm interested to know, of the 64 per cent veterans, what percentage is Canadian Forces versus RCMP or other law enforcement?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: I don't have the exact number at hand, but I could certainly follow up. My understanding is that it's relatively small, in the single digit per cent for RCMP. I think there's a lot of reasons for that. There's relatively more military presence in Nova Scotia, and the sort of work we have done has not traditionally reached out to the RCMP as effectively as military veterans. We see a lot of opportunity in those diversification business lines.

LISA ROBERTS: Maybe this is less of a supplementary and more going off in a slightly other direction. You used the term social mandate enterprise. I'm more used to hearing about social enterprise. I understand that your social mandate is to employ veterans. Can you speak a little bit more to that term and also to exactly how you define yourself and how that social mandate rolls out through the organization?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: I'm not sure that there's actually much of a distinction between the two terms. We do speak in terms of our social mandate all the time internally. We're going through a national strategic planning process that's reviewing our social mandate to maintain its currency, and that's the discussion about whether we're also going to support family members of serving members. Is that within our mandate lines, which has always been traditionally about veterans? Yes, we're certainly very much a mandate-driven organization. The social mandate is at the core of what we do.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the Liberal caucus. Mr. Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I had a couple of questions going through the information here. You obviously employ a lot of Nova Scotian veterans. It's a great organization. I'm just wondering, what is the average salary you pay for the on-the-ground commissionaires?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: There's no meaningful average. I can tell you where the spike in the wage rate is right now. We're not happy about where it is, to be honest. If you stacked up all of our pay rate by hours worked, it's in the \$13 per hour to \$14 per hour range, which is getting scarily close to the minimum wage. If you went back 30 years, we were paying a premium of about 30 per cent above minimum wage. Now we're getting closer to 10 per cent. We have a lot of work to do to keep up.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: For a follow-up, how do you determine your pay, your hourly wage, the structure? How do you determine and what decides the raises? What triggers a review of your salary? Is it all based on the contract, the money you're getting from the contracts?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: That's right. It's all contractually derived. The NMSO, that federal right of first refusal, the process is very transparent and open, and the federal government effectively dictates what the pay rates will be. We're making arguments with them that because of the recent increase in the minimum wage, it should go up. For the commercial contracts, it works much like for any commercial company. We're just bidding on RFPs without a profit margin, so we set it accordingly. Those contracts will dictate whether the increase is cost-of-living adjusted every year or a fixed amount every year or whether we just have to eat the salary or wage increases over the life of the contract if we built it in.

THE CHAIR: We'll move back to the PC caucus, Mr. Ryan.

MURRAY RYAN: First of all, once again, welcome. It's great to have members of our veteran forces here who have served our country so well and continue to keep our communities safe, the same with retired members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police force. Earlier in your presentation, you touched on the fact that your contract is soon coming to an end with the federal government as far as going into negotiations for continuation of that. I believe you said it was of a 10-year duration. I'm just curious: Where do you see pressures coming from related to that? Is there anything we can do on our end,

provincially, to help you in your efforts to secure and at least maintain the level of the quality of the agreement that you currently have with the government?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: I would say I don't know that there are any specific pressure areas on it or at least unique ones. I think it's all of the usual ones that you would expect. They have to do a broad industry consultation. They have to satisfy stakeholders within government. To be honest, we're outside of a lot of the process. We see it working remotely. The file recently transferred from Treasury Board to Veterans Affairs. Now our RFR formally falls under Veterans Affairs Canada. There was a bit of internal churn related to that transfer and gaining some situational awareness of the file. We understand that we're relatively close to the end of the process and that things may look positive. If you're asking what could be done to support that, I would think a letter from the committee would not be unwelcome, at least by us.

MURRAY RYAN: The last time your organization was here, you expressed some interest in wanting a similar type of first right of refusal here in the province. I was just wondering where that may be at currently, if you have made any progress towards that or any further negotiations and discussions.

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: I think the discussions followed a course that you might have anticipated, so we don't have a right of first refusal at the moment. I think we have to be realistic about whether or not that's something the government's prepared to offer. If they are, I'm certainly all for it, but I do think there are some things we can do within the existing procurement manual around sole sourcing to not-for-profits and the existing policies around social procurement and technical weighting in RFPs to support social procurement that are promising avenues for us as well.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the NDP. Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: Thanks for all the information you're providing. I am interested in this slide from Commissionaires offering approximately 30 per cent above minimum wage rates to now being relatively close to minimum wage with the 10 per cent margin. Of course, we welcome the \$1 increase to the minimum wage that is coming this Spring. I imagine that range is going to get even tighter at that point.

I imagine you're continuously bidding on contracts and that those contracts are of different durations. How is it that your wages have slipped behind in terms of offering a premium above minimum wage?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: I think the answer to that may be contained in your question. It's complicated to negotiate. To make promises on the basis of a bid in response to an RFP, it is hard after you've been awarded a three- or five-year contract to go back and say, the price has gone up.



I think it is traditionally because we have paid so far above minimum wage that there was no linkage in our clients' minds between the minimum wage and what commissionaires were getting paid. It didn't occur to them that an experienced security person in their 50s might be getting paid the same or close to the same as a high school kid serving ice cream at the beach in the Summer. Because there's that traditional separation of those two thoughts, the impact of the minimum wage and how that has crept up has been hard to explain to them that this is a very real thing that impacts us now.

Ten or 15 years ago it was relatively easier for us to ignore. I think perhaps we may not have been as agile as we could have been in negotiating with government and dealing with the procurement organizations - not just provincial procurement, but large corporate procurement. It can be difficult to get them to do anything other than buy at the lowest price that they can. That's the challenge we've been up against.

LISA ROBERTS: Of course, minimum wage ultimately ought to be tied back to the cost of actual living, which has also gone up. There's a lot of analysis that in the Halifax area, a living wage would be more like \$19 an hour for those commissionaires that are working as a pension bridge or not ready to retire. They might actually be feeling some cost pressures even working at rising minimum wage levels.

How will you adjust to the \$1 increase that is coming? What does that mean in terms of salary scales for compensating people for experience and seniority in jobs?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: Unfortunately, because we operate a not-for-profit, there is no margin for us to pass a pay raise on within our budget. We just need to have 220 difficult conversations with 220 clients who thought they were going to pay X and, instead, have to pay a little bit more if they want to stay ahead of the minimum wage.

I have a feeling that a certain number of those conversations will probably end in us having to part ways with those clients, but I think the clients that enjoy working with Commissionaires specifically and recognize their value are going to step up. It's just a long, slow process, and you've got to get inside the procurement processes of these large organizations. It's difficult and slow, unfortunately. Not a satisfying answer, I know.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the Liberal caucus. Mr. MacKay.

[2:45 p.m.]

HUGH MACKAY: As an MLA I know that eventually, if I don't retire, I will get fired. I'm like a hockey coach in that sense. You either retire or get fired at some point.

Fortunately, I check off a couple of boxes here. I'm a failed retiree; I like that phrase. I'm a former Army Reservist - sorry - in Ottawa. I know there's a small Naval Reserve there, but I was with the Cameron Highlanders. I check off a couple boxes, so I may come knocking at the door sometime.

I was looking at your website last evening and one of the things that caught my eye was that your security consultants are Certified Protection Professionals. I was wondering if you could dig a little deeper into that for me. That really caught my eye. Who gives the certification? What's involved in getting that certification?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: First, I'll jump back to your reference to the Cameron Highlanders. My great-grandfather was an early Commanding Officer of the predecessor in the 45<sup>th</sup> Battalion that went over in the First World War.

HUGH MACKAY: I don't think I served with him. (Laughter)

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: I'll ask after you.

To answer your question, the certification is provided by ASIS. It's the American Society for Industrial Security, something to that effect. It is sort of the industry standard. Certified Protection Professional is a certification they provide and a credit. Not everyone in the organization has that, of course. That's sort of something you would get mid- or late-career. Our district managers who are our senior operational managers typically have that.

HUGH MACKAY: One thing that struck me in your not well-known facts is your retention rate being very high, not just for the industry but perhaps for most sectors. Here in Nova Scotia, of course, we have challenges with rural employment. You have such a high retention rate, what would you attribute that to?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: I think it's really baked into the organization and who we reach and how we do it. We provide people with a familiar, comfortable work environment doing stuff they like to do. It gives them a sense of purpose. It's really our special sauce, and we're very fortunate to have a lot of the sort of people that we do. We're very fortunate to be able to attract them.

I'm astonished every day when I go around and meet commissionaires who have really interesting backgrounds and a lot of skill and dedication. When I compare that against what they are paid, I have to say I'm more than surprised. Shocked is sometimes the word. It really is something to do with the organization and the way we work and what we offer them that keeps them coming back.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Hamilton. I think it's a lot of pride in there, as well.

We will move on to the PC caucus. Ms. Masland.

KIM MASLAND: You spoke in your presentation about the South Shore. That's part of my constituency. You spoke of the challenges for veterans who are looking for employment with your organization in that area. Approximately how many veterans would you have on the South Shore who would be looking for work with your organization?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: It's difficult, because we don't know exact numbers until we start canvassing. We know anecdotally so and so knows somebody who lives in Shelburne who's looking for work. We do get applications sort of over the transom unexpectedly and unsolicited from specific areas where you just don't have work. We track them loosely, but we don't have exact statistics on that, I'm afraid.

KIM MASLAND: I'm assuming if you had those hospital contracts down through the South Shore with all of our lovely hospitals, you might be able to fill that void.

My next question is: What is the percentage of your business from provincial contracts?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: It's in between 16 and 20 per cent at the moment. I can follow up with the exact number. It's relatively small.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the NDP. Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: I was, for a relatively short time, an executive director of a non-profit organization at the point that we were registering to participate in WCB coverage. I was interested in your remarks about the WCB system and the options that you're weighing at this point in time, as well as what you perceive as a disadvantage to Commissionaires when bidding on RFPs because of your mandatory enrolment in WCB.

I wondered if you could share that a little bit more, because as MLAs, we are obviously generalists. I'm not an expert in WCB, so I was interested to hear those remarks and interested to understand a little bit more about what you're weighing at this juncture in terms of continued participation at WCB.

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: I'm a generalist myself. With my background I've had to become more of an expert in Workers' Compensation than I had expected when I took the job. I think the challenges within WCB are well enough advertised. This is not meant as a critique of anyone who works there. I understand that they work within their legislation, and they have to deliver a program that they can't control in many respects.

What we have found, having priced it out, is that the cost of the commercial insurances that would cover all of the liabilities associated with Workers' Compensation insurance is significantly less expensive, to the extent that we could cover our commissionaires for any type of sickness or injury - not just work-related ones - for the same cost. That was a surprising finding to us as well.

LISA ROBERTS: That is also surprising to me, given that you would assume that sort of a universal, widely subscribed public program ought to be - or I would expect to be - the most affordable option available. That's something to walk away with more questions about, I guess.

Could you explain to me how you see your enrolment in WCB as being a disadvantage when bidding on contracts?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: We see it through two lenses. One is in terms of the return to commissionaires, so if we can offer them a fulsome insurance program that provides them with a better benefit for the same amount of money, we want to do that.

The other bit in terms of a competitive disadvantage is that there are a number of security companies working within Nova Scotia that are based, say, in Montreal or Vancouver that have contracts here. They do not have to enroll in WCB, so we effectively have a payroll tax in comparison to those other providers.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the Liberal caucus. Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: I'm glad you're here today, and I appreciate what your conversations are about. I noted in part of your presentation an initiative that you are trying to upgrade some of the value to the jobs with your commissionaires. I'm just wondering: What portion of the commissionaires, who are more or less paid minimum wage or a dollar above, are the valued type of specialties that they have for security? I'm wondering if you can comment on that.

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: The diversification areas - is how we refer to them - of those four service lines, how much do the other three take up as compared to the traditional commissionaires, is effectively what the question is. It's less than 10 per cent right now, I would say. It's an area that we see growth in. We want to be able to provide them, as those veterans who want to access them release and join us. There is sort of a commercial angle where we have to go out and sell those as a product, but then there's the social mandate side of things where we have to find the people who meet our social mandate who want to fill those jobs.

BILL HORNE: Do you work with the federal government and Forces to see if you can get employees in the region? Do you work with the federal side very much, or is it just left to the individual to come to you?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: We're very proactive in our recruiting. We liaise a lot right now with the military to identify folks who are releasing. They have a process called the Second Career Assistance Network, the SCAN seminars that we participate in. The Military Family Resource Centres, as well, are one way that we reach out. We try to reach veterans before they're veterans. When they're starting to think about what they might do when they get out of the military is really the time to do it. That's how we spend a certain amount of our efforts targeting them.

THE CHAIR: We'll move back to the PC caucus. Mr. Ryan.

MURRAY RYAN: Earlier during your presentation, you mentioned the retail outlet that you just opened up. Was it on Barrington Street?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: Yes.

MURRAY RYAN: Is that a relatively new initiative? Have other Commissionaire organizations across the country been doing similar types of things?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: It's relatively new, within the last 10 years. As compared to an 80-year-old organization, it's new. We just moved to Barrington Street a couple of months ago. We had previously been operating out of the Maritime Centre on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor. It was a relatively lower-profile retail outlet. Now we're expanding it because we want to reinforce success. We're seeing appetite for that sort of work. It does happen elsewhere in the country as well. It's not just Nova Scotia where we're doing this.

MURRAY RYAN: That's all, Madam Chair.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the NDP caucus. Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: I'm hearkening back to your map showing where you're working and where you're living. One of the things that I have been coming to understand as I am in this job a little bit longer is the extent of labour shortages, particularly in rural Nova Scotia, where a number of industries share, through various channels, that the availability of labour is a constraint on their operations. Have you experienced that at all in any of our contracts across Nova Scotia?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: Yes is the short answer. It's definitely a tight labour market. Finding not just people but good people with the right backgrounds and the right experiences who can get security clearances for the positions that require them is always a challenge. That is the business we're in, effectively. In rural areas, I would suggest that we have relatively fewer challenges. HRM is more of the difficulty for us at the moment. I think the salary and wage pressures - you mentioned the cost of living earlier - plays a factor in that as well. In the rural areas, we don't note that difficulty as much, but it is certainly something that has been a feature of the last few years economically.

LISA ROBERTS: You have already made reference to the wage rates, which are not competitive, which are pressured by the rising cost of housing and food and everything else that people are having to pay. Getting back to your 80 per cent retention rate, other than the culture, that people feel good working for the organization, is there something else that you're offering people which helps to explain the retention rate?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: We do offer other benefits as well. Medical and dental benefits that are affordable and accessible are things that we have rolled out recently. We have had life insurance for a long time. Within the security sector, which is not a sector that's known for great employment practices - I have to admit as somebody who has worked in that sector on the private side - we are the standout better employer. That's probably a good part of it.

I would suggest that if you really want to scratch the surface, it is because there is a big group of people who just know the Commissionaires and like the Commissionaires. They were in the military. They had always planned to join the Commissionaires, and then they did. Maybe they got a pension, and they're not necessarily as worried about the financial pressures as long as they can live in their home communities and do something that gives them a sense of meaning. That's the big driver.

THE CHAIR: We will move on to the Liberal caucus. Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I'm just wondering, Mr. Hamilton, if you can walk us through the application or the process whereby you either place or accept an individual requiring an accommodation.

[3:00 p.m.]

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: It's a very good question. I would say the process is quite informal. In many cases the disability requiring accommodation is sometimes not identified at the time of hiring. In the case of Fred and his dog Thunder, it would have been obvious to us.

It's very much an informal process. When we take people in, we do sort of an initial skills assessment, then they go on training. In the course of their training they'll be sort of spoken to, I guess, by what you might term a career counsellor. They'll ask them what they're interested in and what their needs are. It's at that phase where any sort of disability would be discussed or anything that would need to be accommodated, whether it's a disability or not. There are some people who just want to go South for a couple of months every Winter, and they want to be put at a site that allows them to do that.

BEN JESSOME: Unrelated to that, I had a question around your support for employees, I guess, working in some of these rural areas that don't necessarily have a major contract aligned with it.

I'm thinking in some instances I've seen in Alberta where people are picked up in a certain community by a bus and then transported to the job site. Is there anything creative that you as an organization do to facilitate work for commissionaires who may live in some of those "not-red" communities?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: I think we need to get a little bit more creative now particularly as discussed. We are under pressure to find good, talented people from the existing pool. We haven't been pressured enough to have to come up with those creative solutions.

I would suggest that for certain higher margin or better-paying business lines like event security as opposed to static security, we would be able to explore doing stuff like that especially on a one-off basis - busing people in from rural areas or providing some sort of flexible work arrangements.

I'd say the one thing that we offer that I suppose accommodates folks working in very rural areas is a flexible work schedule that allows them to say, I can only do three days a week or I need to be off for two months in the Summer to help my brother on his farm or whatever it may be.

THE CHAIR: We'll move back to the PC caucus. Ms. Masland.

KIM MASLAND: Under the Initiatives slide, there's talk about the non-core policing and investigations. You mentioned, and I think I may have missed it, investigations and support to law enforcement.

I just wondered if you could talk a little bit more about that. Does that mean that Commissionaires could possibly be looking into public complaints, that type of thing, against officers? What exactly does investigations and support mean?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: I guess I'll kick it off and maybe Commissioner Graham can step in if he thinks I missed anything.

It could encompass any number of things. Investigation is obviously a very broad term, so what does that mean exactly? Well, in the security industry it sort of means everything from doing a harassment investigation at a worksite where there's an accusation of harassment, all the way up to trying to find out what happened to the money that disappeared.

At the high end of that spectrum would be things like police complaint investigations, which is not a typical line of business in the security industry at all. I think most security companies would not be regarded as trusted enough to engage in that sort of work, but because we have investigators with major crime investigation backgrounds who have security clearances, it's something that we could provide, absolutely. We are having those discussions and looking forward to furthering them.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the NDP. Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: Under your Surprising Facts it states that because you're a Nova Scotia-based not-for-profit, you generate 20 per cent more provincial tax revenue for every dollar and create 18 per cent more employment for Nova Scotians.

I'm just wondering if you can break down those stats a little bit for me. I'm a huge fan of the not-for-profit sector, but I'm not entirely sure what that math is.

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: I'm not an economist either. I'd be happy to share the economic impact assessment with the committee that breaks it down. Effectively, if I understand it correctly, there are two factors. There is the "not being based in Nova Scotia" factor and the "not being for-profit factor." Being based in Nova Scotia, I think the economic impact of that is obviously a little bit more tangible. We understand there is a headquarters of 40-odd people in Bedford. They do things and those salaries are here instead of Montreal or London or wherever they might otherwise be. From what I understand that accounts for about half of the effect of those numbers.

Being not-for-profit versus for-profit, I suppose we're a unique not-for-profit in that we compete for work against for-profit companies. The way the shareholder structure is and the way the money flows around that - and this is where it sort of gets into economic forecasting models I don't quite understand - it is because we're not satisfying shareholder profit that it gets paid as a dividend at a lower tax rate or in some other way. The money tends to flow in the communities more, and that's how the tax effect breaks out.

CORINNE MACLELLAN: Just to add to that, quickly. It is important to note that the study was done with the provincial input-output model so that the numbers will speak the same language.

LISA ROBERTS: I appreciate that. It's great to know that you have a 40ish-person headquarters in Bedford, but you are also part of a national organization in some capacity. What services are provided to you at a national level, or how does that relationship work?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: Very little is done nationally, so we're a true federation in the sense that the stand-alone, autonomous divisions really do run their own businesses. We do have a Commissionaires national office in Ottawa. It's an office of five people. It's effectively a representative office for liaison with the federal government, and that's about it. There's a certain amount of marketing support that happens there, but compared to the organization, it's not a head office by any means. It's really a very small support organization.



MARJORIE HICKEY: Just to supplement that, the national office is the owner of our brand - the copyright of our symbol and all of our branding - so some of that marketing effort is helmed at the national office.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the Liberal caucus. Mr. MacKay.

HUGH MACKAY: Did I hear in your preamble that you provide some services at correctional facilities? How does that work with our own Public Service employees? I'm assuming your staff aren't unionized. Can you speak to how that works when you're in a provincial facility?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: The work we do for Corrections is predominantly federal, so it's Corrections Canada. We do a certain amount of work, I believe, with one of the provincial correction institutions. In terms of how that breaks down and union versus non-union, they're not correctional officers by any means. They're doing the work of commissionaires at correctional institutions, which has led to interesting things.

They do engage indirectly in the work of correctional officers. We recently had a commissionaire who found a shank that had been prepared and pre-positioned for use at a correction institute. The work is hazardous, in many respects, but they are doing what you would consider to be traditional commissionaire work. They are escorting contractors in particular.

HUGH MACKAY: In a completely different direction, with the ever-growing concerns of cybersecurity, is that an area that you're moving into, probably higher end jobs, higher end contracts?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: We see it as a real potential area. There is a whole trade in the military of folks who do just that. We would love to be able to provide work for those folks, but those folks also tend not to be the sort of veterans who have trouble finding jobs. There are a lot of people looking at that area.

Our sister division in Quebec has actually developed a cybersecurity capability, so we're talking with them about how we might be able to provide that here in Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: We'll move back to the PC caucus. Mr. Ryan.

MURRAY RYAN: In relation to security services provided by Commissionaires, the focus has been basically surrounding retired veterans, retired former members of the police forces, what have you. Do you have any instances where non-retired members of the police forces and/or active members are participating with Commissionaires?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: We do have instances of that, less on the police side, more on the active members side. I myself would be considered an active member of the military because I'm still in the reserve. We have quite a number of active reservists who are in Commissionaires. We also provide support for certain one-off events, particularly at peak season, that are the sort of things that serving members might want to do on a weekend, for instance, because they want to be at this event. We have a certain amount of that as well, but of course, it would be subject to whatever their operational requirements are, and it can be difficult, obviously, to forecast their availability months out.

MARJORIE HICKEY: I was just going to follow up. On the handout, there's a good example of the answer to the question that you just asked. We have Private Diallo with the Princess Louise Fusiliers here in Halifax as a reservist but also working as a commissionaire. It's just one illustration of how currently serving members of the reserve force, for example, can be double-hatted in doing both roles.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the NDP. Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: I would be interested to hear from the members of the board of governors who are here in terms of what motivates you to, I assume, volunteer with this organization. I find often people who are on boards are not on one board. There's no shortage of places, all the same, where you could be lending your time and your experience. What is the motivation in being involved?

MARJORIE HICKEY: The motivation for me really goes back to my own background. My father was in the British Navy during the war. He served there and then joined the Canadian Navy following his retirement. I grew up with an appreciation for the military.

I joined the naval reserve when I was in high school just for a Summer job and thoroughly enjoyed it. It taught me so much. It gave me an understanding of the ethos of military culture, which I think speaks to many of the things that Geoff spoke about that cause people to stay in our organization: the sense of camaraderie, the sense of loyalty, the sense of belonging to an organization that is doing good in the community and for your country.

It's all of those kinds of values that make me appreciate all of the work that is continuing to be done by our veterans and makes me want to contribute back in some small way through volunteering on the board. It's a very fulfilling organization to belong to.

STEPHEN GRAHAM: I could easily say ditto. I would add to that the added dynamic of meeting such wonderful people who are committed through a sense of duty and providing service. Certainly, throughout my career, I worked a lot with Commissionaires, with the Canadian Forces personnel, with other policing services and so on, often in challenging and trying circumstances.

I guess it's an opportunity to give back to people who I have an understanding about: the commitments that they have made, how they have moved across the country, how they have disadvantaged their families many times, how their kids have gone through a lot of turmoil being in different schools. There's an opportunity to support them now and improve their lives.

This is a wonderful organization for that. People have a great sense of belonging, they have a great opportunity to continue to contribute, and they get a great sense of value from working. I'm just tickled pink to be part of this.

[3:15 p.m.]

THE CHAIR: Ms. MacLellan, would you like to offer something?

CORINNE MACLELLAN: Absolutely. I think my path is a little bit more winding and possibly less virtuous than my colleagues'. I'll try to keep it short.

As we approached the commemorative period - many of you would know, the commemorative period being for the Great War, which was 2014-2018 - I was engaged to organize an incoming mission from Belgium, all Belgian people who were coming to see what we were doing for the commemorative period. I started, through that process, to learn a little bit more about our own military history - our very proud military history.

By way of that, I learned a lot about my own family. You don't have to scratch the surface very far on any of us to find a hero in your own midst. I was moved by that whole experience to a point where, I think my husband would say, I became a bit obsessed with it. I started to look at how we commemorate and how we mark our own military history. I became very involved in the Army Museum. I co-chaired a project that I thought would be very simple but became probably one of the most complicated things I ever did, which was the Last Steps Memorial Arch on the waterfront.

I didn't think I'd have a visual aid today, but I do have one. I hope everybody has an opportunity to read this. This is Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War. I actually was thumbing through it last night looking back to the beginnings of supporting veterans when they returned home from wartime and from service and so on and so forth.

Actually, Nova Scotia has led the way historically in this country in supporting veterans. To be part of this organization at this stage in my life, and through my own education, has been really inspiring. It's an honour, and to be able to serve in this way is really special.

THE CHAIR: Thank you to all of you. I thank you for that lovely question too.

We will move on to the Liberal caucus. Mr. Horne.

BILL HORNE: I just want a little more information about the 16 per cent to 20 per cent contracts from provincial. I know quite a few of the commissionaires that work here, for instance. I'm just wondering if they're the long-term - not just them but any other provincial contracts you have - are they kind of the long-term contracts?

They seem to be happy most times, and I hope that's correct. As long as we're behaving. (Laughter) We do employ a lot in the province, and I just wanted to know a little bit more on how long they stay and what kind of salary range they might make over a number of years and that sort of thing.

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: Those are the long-term contracts. When we say long term, we mean sort of it's a permanent position, and the person is there for a year or two years or three years on a contract side. They also tend to be long term in the sense that the folks are the same faces you see year after year for many years. That's particularly the case at Government House and Province House.

There are some folks who are very proud to be there. I would say their motivation and pride to be there is perhaps not matched by the wages paid. That's something I have to take a certain amount of ownership for because it's something the organization has allowed to creep up on us. We're having those discussions now, but again, it's always in the context of a procurement organization that's designed to procure at the lowest cost.

I'd certainly be happy to dig up those numbers and provide them if you wanted them. Not enough I guess is the short answer and maybe the predictable one.

BILL HORNE: I guess a lot of other veterans are going through your services. I'm just wondering, what type of past backgrounds do they have or not have?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: Well, it takes a village. We take all comers in the sense that obviously we're a veteran organization, and it's about providing meaningful employment for veterans. In order to do that, we have to be able to, in certain areas, round out the numbers to meet a specific client requirement.

That being the case, we have a prioritization. We would look for somebody who's a family member of a veteran and beyond that, folks who have a specific skill set in a specific area or they have previous experience in the emergency services that aren't, strictly speaking, military or RCMP. It's very relevant to what we do and probably more relevant, I would think, to the province.

THE CHAIR: We'll move back to the PC caucus. Ms. Masland.

KIM MASLAND: One quick question. When a veteran comes to your organization looking for employment, what is the process that they have to go through? Do they go through screening, training? Could you lay out the actual process, please?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: We place ads continuously and actually approach people on social media through LinkedIn who look like they might be retiring members. People who are thinking about leaving the military will get in touch with them proactively to discuss what they may be thinking about.

Once we get an application, they have an interview, they do a bit of an aptitude test, a skills assessment, and a needs assessment. From there, we do the background checking - that's obviously a big step for us - and they would be scheduled into a course to do their training. The basic training is two weeks long. Obviously, some people have trouble getting two weeks off straight to do the work, so we may have to forecast them out a couple of months in advance until they're able to get the time.

On the course of the training, in parallel they would start doing the security clearance application for the folks that we tend to employ at federal sites that require security clearances, which is the bulk of them in Nova Scotia because of all the defence facilities here.

The security clearance can be quite time consuming. That can impair the ability to employ people who are ready to be employed. What we'll try to do is to employ them at commercial sites that don't require a security clearance until that clearance comes through. It's quite a pipeline. It can be a couple of months long, unfortunately, as much as we try to streamline it.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the NDP. Ms. Roberts.

LISA ROBERTS: Following up on Mr. Horne's question about the provincial work that you do and those pressures of meeting the minimum wage increases, other than what you're being paid for a contract, which may have been entered into a couple of years ago, I guess the other place where you could try to make up those minimum wage pressures would be through saving on your operations. I'm wondering what, if any, space you have in your operations to make things more efficient. It seems like there's not much scope for asking the federal office to take work off of you.

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: In terms of how much fat there is, is the question I hear, and it's a legitimate one. It's surprisingly lean. It's a team of about 40 people that direct the employment of another 1,400, so there's not a lot to cut unfortunately. As much as I might like to be able to free that up, you can only arrange the chess pieces on the board in so many different ways.

In terms of generally what we bill to our clients, we think about in terms of a markup on the basic wage that they get. It tends to be about 25 per cent of what we bill to the client is not basic wage. Another 20 per cent of that 25 per cent is the cost of payroll directly. It's CPP and EI contributions, WCB contributions, pay for statutory holidays that are earned, but not worked. That comes to about 20 per cent for us. The remainder is the pure overhead, and of course there are a lot of fixed costs there as well, related to uniforms and trainings and stuff that we really can't pare back. Unfortunately, not much.

LISA ROBERTS: Maybe not so much a supplementary, but sort of an unrelated question related to security clearances. I'm wondering about the barriers to employment that some Nova Scotians face due to previous convictions. Even veterans can have something like that on their record. How many people are actually screened out of being able to meet those criteria?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: We don't track it in terms of how many are screened out for that specific reason, but you're right, you can almost regard it as a form of disability that could be accommodated through employment, and the security clearances only apply to certain of the federal work. We do have a lot of work that could be done by somebody who had a prior conviction. I suppose if we satisfied ourselves that this is somebody who we wanted to employ in a position of trust in a security role, that would be because it was a conviction that could be discharged.

We do provide support for discharging previous convictions. In fact, it is one of the services we offer through that ID services, criminal background check service. You can apply to have previous convictions discharged, so we would try to support them in that sense. To a certain extent, clients just ask that there not be prior convictions on record for folks they employ, and we have to respect that, but you're right. I see the problem.

THE CHAIR: We've done about seven questions from each of the caucuses. I have Mr. MacKay for the last one. After Mr. MacKay's question, we can have your final remarks, and if you would like to leave after that, we can do some committee business. Thank you so much, it has been amazing.

HUGH MACKAY: I want to be sure that when you leave us today that I fully understand what your ask is of me as an individual MLA, what I can do, and what your ask is of this committee. Could you help me with that?

GEOFFREY HAMILTON: I appreciate the question. You'll notice that one of the slides was not things that we want you to do, because I suppose we saw this as an informative brief to tell you about some things, some problems we're trying to solve for ourselves. As individual MLAs, what can you do to support that? I guess be aware and supportive if you hear somebody talking about these things that you hear commissionaires are doing. I guess be the informed person who tells them what I've told you today, put it into that context. In terms of what the committee can do to support, I think the question

about the renewal of the right of first refusal and what could be done there, I think a letter to the Minister of Veterans Affairs or even the Prime Minister would be very welcome.

THE CHAIR: I already wrote it down. I'm sure one of my colleagues will bring this up in the business, and I truly want to thank you. If you have a few more final remarks, please go ahead.

MARJORIE HICKEY: Thank you to everyone for asking such informed and thoughtful questions. It's very much appreciated that you've shown an interest in our organization. Maybe if I could just add to the asks that Geoff has mentioned - you're all obviously in positions of influence with others within government, and you've heard Geoff speak to some of the problems that we have with RFPs and the criteria that are included on RFPs.

To the extent you're having any of these discussions with your colleagues, bear in mind that it's more than just the cheapest contract that is often the best contract. Bear in mind that when you're looking at hiring security services that you're looking at getting the value of a veteran, and that's not necessarily the bottom dollar to pay for security services. If you could just keep those thoughts in mind as you're having your discussions with your colleagues about influencing the content of RFPs, we would be hugely appreciative of that.

Just before I leave, there was one part of the work that we do that we didn't really get a chance to touch on today. If you could give Ms. MacLellan about one minute to speak about the work of our Veteran Support Committee, because in addition to providing meaningful employment for commissionaires, we also do some direct support of veteran initiatives throughout the province. I didn't want to leave without you having just a short understanding of that.

CORINNE MACLELLAN: As soon as you said, "the value of a veteran," I was going to try to segue there somehow. I am a very proud member of the Veteran Support Committee at Commissionaires Nova Scotia. Annually we know that our competitors, in talking about the RFP process and looking at how we evaluate bidders on those types of things, one of the things that we do that our competitors certainly don't do is support veterans in a way that we do.

[3:30 p.m.]

Just to give you a sense of the numbers in the past year, our committee disbursed \$14,000 to medical facilities that support veterans in long-term care. We contributed \$5,000 toward veteran support organizations and another \$5,000 to commissionaires in urgent need.

We also - and I know we all had an opportunity to participate in this - donated \$7,500 toward Commissionaires families for education initiatives. Those are numbers that when we see them, they are numbers on a page, but I can say, having had the opportunity to be at some of these cheque presentations, they're very specific to in-facility care enhancements, for example. They are everything from assistive aids for, obviously, people with disabilities, but also wheelchair accommodations, dental care - these are things that would probably have never really crossed many of our minds. We are working closely with those organizations.

We also see other things like extracurricular supports, and I can speak to that from a personal perspective because I had an opportunity to visit Taigh Na Mara in Glace Bay, which is a facility that supports veterans. They had an accessible swing which was a delight of many of the veterans who were there. We also support Paws Fur Thought, an important organization that we know provides effective therapy, and other historical organizations like the HMCS Sackville association.

We know that that is part of our mandate, but we also would like to see, in some way, it reflected in the grading or the evaluation of these types of RFP processes.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of everyone, I want to thank you. This has been enlightening, and we will definitely try to do something to support you. We are very grateful for your service.

We will take a two-minute recess to give them time to leave.

[3:32 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[3:34 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: I call the committee back to order. For business, we have a piece of correspondence. There's a request from Rear-Admiral Barry Keeler to come back - you have a copy of the letter. I guess they were here in 2010, but that was before my time. Is everybody okay with inviting them? Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I would just suggest that this is an appropriate conversation to be had at our next agenda-setting meeting.

THE CHAIR: I didn't finish. The clerk told me that we have subjects already until the Fall, so it will be in the next one. As long as everybody is okay with that, we will put it on the agenda setting.

BEN JESSOME: Thank you, Madam Chair.



THE CHAIR: Is there any other business you would like to speak about before we do the next meeting? Mr. Ryan.

MURRAY RYAN: Back on June 18, 2019, and again in the September 17<sup>th</sup> committee meeting, there was discussion surrounding sending a letter to the Department of Health and Wellness requesting that they look into changing the policy so that veterans and their spouses can stay together in long-term care. I wanted to bring it to the committee to find out if this letter was sent to the department.

THE CHAIR: I'll refer that to the clerk.

JUDY KAVANAGH: I'm afraid you've caught me unprepared because the clerk of this committee retired last week, and I have just taken this one over. I'm happy to look into it. I can report back at the next meeting.

MURRAY RYAN: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Our next meeting is scheduled for April 21<sup>st</sup>, from 2:00 p.m. until 4:00 p.m., if the House has risen by then. The presentation will be from the Residents Council Committee of the Northumberland Veterans Unit, re the capacity and utilization of the unit.

Are there any other questions? If not, I call this meeting adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 3:36 p.m.]