

HANSARD

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COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Tuesday, November 15, 2022

COMMITTEE ROOM

Military Transition into Skilled Trade

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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Tamer Nusseibeh
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Karen Kinley
Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration

Nicole Johnson-Morrison, Associate Deputy Minister
Marjorie Davison, Senior Executive Director

Mainland Nova Scotia Building Trades

Brad Smith, Executive Director
Dave Giannou, Atlantic Representative for Helmets to Hardhats Program

Canadian Armed Forces Transition Centre Halifax

Sandra Clattenburg, Acting Service Manager
Lt.-Col. Ross Bonnell, Commanding Officer

Nova Scotia Community College

Don Bureaux, President



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2022

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

2:00 P.M.

CHAIR
Chris Palmer

VICE CHAIR
Danielle Barkhouse

THE CHAIR: Order. I call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. My name is Chris Palmer, MLA for Kings West and Chair of this committee.

Today we'll hear from presenters regarding military transition into skilled trade. At this point, I would like to ask all our guests and our members to please turn off your phones or put them on silent. In case of an emergency, please use the Granville Street exit right out here, and walk over to the Grand Parade.

At this point, I would like to ask all members to please introduce themselves and your constituency. Ms. Barkhouse, we'll begin with you.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I'd also like to note the presence of Legislative Counsel Karen Kinley to my right, and Legislative Committee Clerk Tamer Nusseibeh next door to me, and Administrative Support Clerk Kim Leadley.

Before we begin our conversation this afternoon, as the Chair, I'd like to take a minute to reflect on the fact that we just came through Remembrance Day weekend. I know a lot of us had a chance to probably get out to many Remembrance Day services around the province. It's always a very special time. To sit on the Veterans Affairs Committee and be at those services takes on a special meaning. I just wanted to make that comment and say I hope we all had a chance to get out on the weekend and reflect on the day. To all of our veterans and those who continue to wear the uniform for us, we thank you for your service and your sacrifices.

As I mentioned, our topic today is Military Transition into Skilled Trade. We'd like to welcome all our witnesses today. I'd like to ask our witnesses who are sitting here at the table to introduce themselves, and if you'd like, as each person goes along, introduce the person who's with you as well. We'll begin with Ms. Johnson-Morrison.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I'd like to open it up for our guests today to offer any opening remarks that they may have. Ms. Johnson-Morrison, we can begin with you, if you'd like.

NICOLE JOHNSON-MORRISON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for extending an invitation to the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration for this discussion on military transitions into skilled trade. Joining me from the department today, as I've mentioned before, is Ms. Marjorie Davison. She's a senior executive director of the Skills and Learning branch.

For generations, Nova Scotians have contributed to Canada's defence and security. Last week, Nova Scotians across the province took the time, like many Canadians, to recognize the Canadians who have fought and died while answering that call to serve.

Nova Scotia is home to more than 40 per cent of Canada's military assets, including the country's largest military base. Nova Scotia is also the only province in Canada with a Minister responsible for Military Relations. This reflects our long history of military and how important it is to Nova Scotia's economy and culture.

Nova Scotians are proud of our military personnel. Chances are, we all know someone who has served in the military. They are our relatives, neighbours, colleagues, and friends. In their time serving Canada, they have developed many unique skillsets - skills that Nova Scotia needs right now. Currently, Nova Scotia is experiencing tremendous growth. More people than ever are choosing to call Nova Scotia home.

Almost one year ago, on December 16, 2021, we became one million strong. This was the first time that Nova Scotia's population reached a million people. We are continuing to soar past that milestone as we work towards our goal of reaching a population of two million by 2060.

There is an excitement in this province that we haven't felt in a long time. The number of Nova Scotians employed has hit record highs recently, and our unemployment rate continues to trend low. With that growth comes unprecedented opportunities and challenges. To relieve this pressure, Nova Scotia needs skilled trades workers to help us build the infrastructure, and we need to support this growth.

The Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration has taken on many efforts to recruit the right personnel. We have invested in targeted recruitment campaigns for international and domestic workers. We have marketed skilled trades to underrepresented groups. We have increased the journeyman-to-apprentice ratio to allow more people to train at once, and we have worked with Finance and Treasury Board to introduce a tax incentive for workers under 30 through the More Opportunity for Skilled Trades program.

These efforts have been critical to Nova Scotia's strategic population growth goals and labour needs, and we continue to find creative solutions. Our province is growing, and we are looking for skilled trade workers to help us build Nova Scotia.

Military members are well suited for these types of trades and will be great in the skilled trades when they're ready to transition into civilian careers. In return, skilled trades offer rewarding and viable careers, and career paths. It is a chance to serve communities in high-demand careers that pay well.

As government, we can help military personnel identify opportunities that are right for them in the communities they want to live in. We can help them transfer their in-demand skills to our workforce. To support their journey, we're working with industry partners who understand the unique transition a military person is making into a civilian career. Partners like my colleagues around the table today: Mainland Nova Scotia Building Trades, Helmets to Hardhats, the Nova Scotia Community College, and the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency.

Currently, the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency recognizes various Red Seal trades with military equivalents. The Apprenticeship Agency can assess someone who has partially completed their military trades training and wants to continue their trade learning for an apprenticeship, or someone who has completed their military trades training may be eligible to challenge for the Red Seal certification-related training.

There are many military trades that transfer to Red Seal trades. For example, someone who works in construction as a construction technician in the military could challenge for the equivalent interprovincial Red Seal trade as a carpenter. That's just one example.

While there are many opportunities, making these transitions can be difficult for military personnel. We want them to know that they are not alone, and we can help guide them through this process. To start, they can reach out to the Apprenticeship Agency to discuss their current trade status, or if they're uncertain, they can call to find out about a

trade that they might want to pursue or to learn from us as to how to connect to jobs through the Nova Scotia work centres, where we offer free online and in-person help.

I am proud to share that Nova Scotia Works centres have helped 235 military clients between 2017 and 2021, 47 of whom have accessed funding supports. In addition, the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency has helped 41 people with military training challenge for the Red Seal certification. They have already answered the call to serve their country. We are proud to answer the call to serve them as they transition their careers and find meaningful work in the skilled trades. Thank you, and I look forward to today's discussion and to answering your questions.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Bureaux, do you have any opening remarks?

DON BUREAUX: I do, Mr. Chair, and thank you. I want to express my sincere appreciation to both you, Mr. Chair, and many friends, fellow committee members who are here today. As we know, and has been cited often, there are literally thousands of veterans leaving the service with our military every year. So it is an honour to be able to speak and show how important it is for us to have solutions to help provide pathways for these individuals when they leave the service.

We know that this transition can take on many, many forms. Of course, we heard a talk today about the transition to the skilled trades. At NSCC and our partner colleges - and other community partners across the country - our goal is to find smoother pathways. That's a term that we use often. Let's make the pathway as smooth as possible for those coming from the military, and how we may recognize and enhance their prior learning and create better credential mapping for our former service personnel.

This is something that we've been actively engaged with for a number of years. Coincidentally, just last week we signed an MOU with two other Canadian colleges - kind of from coast to coast to coast - in affiliation with our national body, Colleges and Institutes Canada, to create a more holistic pan-Canadian view of making sure that our military personnel have a smooth transition.

This agreement that we recently signed will offer the chance to create a more thoughtful approach in an admissions process that will help ease the transition from military life to a new career as a civilian. We also want to work - I'll just mention my valued colleague here - to remove any inter-provincial barriers that may exist because we know our workforce is very mobile now. Just as importantly, we want to make sure that learner supports are in place to adequately address what, in some instances, are very serious needs.

I know many of you are quite familiar with NSCC and our work. We have campuses, as you know, from Sydney to Springhill, and from Amherst to Yarmouth. In fact, we have 13 campuses with one e-campus. We're constantly looking for ways to enhance our efforts to realize our mission, which is to build the economy and quality of life

for Nova Scotia through education and innovation. To do that, we look outside the walls for new opportunities. For example, we work very closely with CFB Gaagetown, with Shearwater, and with Greenwood, and have done so over the years with support of customized training to meet their unique needs for upskilling.

We've also supported defence industry contractor partnerships such as the Irving Shipbuilding marine manufacturing initiative, a program called Pathways to Shipbuilding program. It has been a very successful initiative to bring more underrepresented communities into the industry. We worked very closely with industry partners like Telus to do work for studies.

Outside some of the specific examples of the work that we weave into our regular programming, I want to share with you just a couple examples of graduates who have come to us following a career in the military. We've often used the word "resilient" as a word to describe Eric Payne. Eric Payne is a Radio Television Journalism student at NSCC. After a near-death experience, which claimed part of his leg and resulted in a medical release from the Canadian Armed Forces, Eric turned to a new career - to this field of radio and television arts to broaden his reach and share his stories with others.

A second example is Antonia Wareham. She's an amazing young lady. She delivered packages for UPS, drove a Halifax Transit bus, and joined the Canadian Armed Forces Reserves. Now she's found new success through the Irving Pathways to Shipbuilding program. She is now working as a civilian to build our next generation of ships.

These are one of many very inspirational career stories and transitions that are examples of the college working with our community partners to make sure that we're focused on helping individuals make that all-important transition from a military life to a civilian life.

Quite frankly, we agree at NSCC, and we know our partners agree, that our community and these individuals deserve nothing less. We owe it to these heroes who have stood on the front lines and defended our country, and we want to be part of the pathway back for them to a civilian life. We are, I believe, well positioned as a province to continue to provide important supports, to create community pathways, to remove barriers, and to help open doors - and in doing so, create a groundwork of support in the needs within our fast-growing economy.

It is an honour to be here today. I did partake in the events on the weekend. It makes today's conversation even more special.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Smith, do you have any opening remarks?

BRAD SMITH: I appreciate the opportunity to be here today and to share the work that's under way every day by the Building Trades - military transition into the skilled trades.

[2:15 p.m.]

I bring my comments from a couple of perspectives here. I'm board chair of the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency. I'm executive director for the Mainland Nova Scotia Building Trades. I'm also president of Build Right Nova Scotia, which represents 11,000 skilled Nova Scotian tradespeople and 300-plus contractors who employ them.

The work in supporting our veterans is very personal. My father was a naval air pilot based here in Shearwater. I remember vividly as a teenager the struggles my family had when my dad was transitioning out of the military into civilian life.

I want to provide a brief overview of the structure and foundation actually needed to support an effective transition for our veterans. To close my opening remarks, I would ask that Dave Giannou give you some information on the Helmets to Hardhats program, which is under way.

So why do you need support and structure for this work? Well, any career transition, as we know, is not simple. When it's an individual from an underrepresented community or a veteran, which is the focus of today, these individuals have unique challenges. They have unique skills and knowledge. As well, each trade is unique. So it requires a lot of time and effort to align the veterans with the right opportunity, and the support systems that are critical to bridge the many challenges that they would face transitioning from the military into the trades.

The structure of the building trade unions provides the foundation to this work. We are the largest private sector trainer in the country, with 300 training centres across Canada. In Nova Scotia, we invest about \$7 million and have seven training centres across this province. We have full-time trainers as well as recruitment and retention specialists. This includes Build Together, Women of the Building Trades, a dedicated resource specialist for the Indigenous communities, and Helmets to Hardhats is our program specific to the needs of our veterans.

The systems and structures are in place and the job opportunities are available, so what are the barriers and challenges? Well, veterans come with many skills - teamwork, work ethic, discipline, leadership, and so on. But many of the more technical skills may not be as readily recognizable. I know that the community college and the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency and others are doing much more work on that area, and that's important work to happen.

Even when there's a strong alignment, it still requires extra support and training to transition, and ultimately, successfully challenge and pass things like the Red Seal exams

for the certification. A simple example: in April 2016, I was honoured to be part of the announcement that recognized the equivalency of a DND 404 licence with no additional training, because this made sense. If you can drive a transport truck or a bus in the military, why not the same as a civilian?

However, for the more technical skills of the trades, it is much more complex to assess and give credit for prior learning and experience. Often support and training need to be tailored on an individual basis because one size will not fit all.

The challenges of our veterans are similar to the challenges new Canadians or underrepresented groups face. We have to meet them where they are. It's not only the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do if we are going to grow our skilled workforce. So in summary, we have the opportunities. We have both private and public training pathways and a responsive apprenticeship system.

Now, just to share the remaining closing remarks and share how the Helmets to Hardhats Canada program supports veterans in transitioning to the trades, please - if the Chair would recognize Dave Giannou with Helmets to Hardhats.

THE CHAIR: Yes, we had that conversation. We'll ask Mr. Giannou to come in and finish those comments.

DAVE GIANNOU: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee. My name is Dave Giannou. I'd like to thank you for inviting me here today to discuss this important topic of veterans transitioning into meaningful second careers in the unionized construction trade industry and skilled trades.

I speak today on behalf of Helmets to Hardhats, a national not-for-profit organization that celebrated 10 years of success last May. Our primary goal is to support veterans, the reservists, their spouses, their families, and their dependents. We work with senior members of the cadet organizations across Canada. Recently, we've received permission from our board of directors to work with resettled Afghan interpreters as they transition into a civilian life. By working with the Canadian Building Trade Unions and their employers, we've referred over 2,500 veterans into well-paying second careers as unionized tradespeople.

I've had the honour of serving my country for 36 years in the Royal Canadian Navy, retiring in 2018. I joined Helmets to Hardhats in 2021 as the Atlantic Canada representative to provide more focus on the Helmets to Hardhats' relationships within the unions, the governments, and our registered clients in Atlantic Canada.

Helmets to Hardhats Canada is a national organization that is primarily funded by the Canadian Building Trade Unions and their employers. We also apply for provincial and federal grants for targeted programs to support our veterans as they transition into second careers in civilian life.

Our staff consists mainly of veterans, with some industry representatives. Our national executive director, Joseph Maloney, is a boilermaker with 48 years experience in the trade. We have Jamie MacMillan, one of our outreach specialists - she is an ironworker with 20 years of experience. The rest of us are veterans with several years of experience.

As veterans, we understand the challenges faced by other veterans who are transitioning from the armed forces into a civilian job. For myself, after 36 years of service, it was terrifying stepping out of the uniform and into civilian service.

I'd like to provide a brief overview of how Helmets to Hardhats works. A veteran who is contemplating release or who is already released will register for an account on our website. Once they have provided a resume and proof of service, we will contact them and schedule one-on-one meetings with them to discuss their futures. We'll reach out in person, with our primary focus of discussion to provide high-level overview on education on the Canadian Building Trade Units and a process involved in conducting an apprenticeship in the 60-plus represented trades.

We discuss the members experience, qualifications, and intentions, understanding that not all veterans want to continue in their current trade - and many cannot as there isn't an equivalent civilian trade. Once we have determined what trades they are interested in and where they want to settle, we work closely with the appropriate union to help ease the member's transition into that trade. We aid in the transition process by providing free safety training through some of our government grants, which streamlines and expedites the process of getting our veterans on a job site to provide for their families and the community.

I'd like to highlight to this committee that the service that Helmets to Hardhats offers Canadian veterans and reservists is free of charge. As much of our funding comes from the industry, we never charge any of the Helmets to Hardhats participants a fee for our services.

One advantage that reservists have in this venue is the ability to continue to serve their country while pursuing a career in the trades. One of the reservist trade persons said to me: we build what we protect, and we protect what we build.

In my experience, I've found that the trade unions and their employers are very supportive of this program nationally. I've personally been overwhelmed by the support I have received through direct communications during my tenure. They respect and admire what our veterans have done and what they signed up to do. As my boss is often heard saying: For what these fine brave women and men do for us, offering them more options when coming home is just the right thing to do.

Thank you once again for offering me the opportunity to provide you with information on this issue.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Giannou. Lieutenant-Colonel Bonnell.

LT.-COL. ROSS BONNELL: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to begin by thanking you for the privilege of addressing you today on this important issue. It is incredibly reassuring for me, as a leader in the Canadian Armed Forces, to know that leadership at the provincial level is focused on bettering the lives of our veterans and their families.

My mission at the transition unit is as follows. It is to deliver personalized, professional, and standardized casualty support and transition services to all Canadian Armed Forces members and their families, in order to establish seamless transition and enhanced well-being, with special attention provided to the ill and injured personnel, their families and the families of the fallen.

It's a mission that I'm utterly seized by, inspired by, and motivated by every single day. I can tell you that it is an honour and a privilege to command the four Transition Centers across my area of operation. I have two in my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador, in Gander and St. John's; and two here in Nova Scotia, in Greenwood, and at Windsor Park here in Halifax.

Nationally, 8,000-10,000 veterans release from the Canadian Armed Forces each and every year, and this number has been growing. In Nova Scotia in 2020, 506 members released. This figure grew to 674 members in 2021. Already in 2022, 754 members have released in this province, largely from the bases in Greenwood and Halifax.

To meet the need implicit in these numbers, we are growing and optimizing the support that we provide to Canadian Armed Forces members and their families. When I took command at the transition unit in April, 42 supported members were posted to my unit. This number has now grown to over 100 members, and this figure does not include the 600-700 Canadian Armed Forces members who routinely access the services at our Transition Centres without actually being posted there.

This brings me to the topic of military transitions to skilled trades. Before any Canadian Armed Forces member is released, there is a holistic assessment of their readiness to conduct that transition. This assessment is conducted along seven domains of well-being. In no order of priority, these domains are:

1. finances;
2. social integration;
3. life skills;
4. housing and physical environment;
5. culture and social environment;
6. health; and,
7. sense of purpose.

When I am conducting an assessment of a member's readiness to transition, the optimal outcome is retention within the Canadian Armed Forces if this is a viable option. The Canadian Armed Forces are currently approximately 10,000 members short, and the Chief of Defence Staff's Reconstitution Directive last month focused on growing the force through recruitment and retention.

However, retention is not always a viable option for releasing members for a number of different reasons. For these members, it is our responsibility to ensure that they are maximally supported through the transition from CAF member to veteran. Looking again at the seven domains of well-being, a transition from CAF member to skilled tradesperson is highly indicative of a sound transition plan. For example, there is a clear linkage between employment in a skilled trade, and financial well-being, housing, sense of purpose, and life skills.

At my transition unit, we have a number of outstanding programs designed to enable the transition from serving member to skilled tradesperson. We have provided each committee member with a list of these programs and a brief description of each. I hope to be able to discuss some of these programs in the question and answer period.

One program that I do want to mention here is the Canadian Armed Forces Vocational Rehabilitation Program for Serving Members, or VRPSM. VRPSM enables eligible CAF members who have been notified of an impending medical release to commence participation in vocational rehabilitation training, or on the job training with a civilian employer, for up to six months prior to their final release date. Regionally, the VRPSM program has grown from supporting 32 members in 2018, to 57 members in 2021. VRPSM is only one of the programs that directly enables a transition from serving member to veteran employed in a skilled trade.

I consider such a transition to be your prototypical win-win scenario. By enabling such a transition, we are enabling the success of that member post-release along each of the seven domains of wellness. At the same time, the Canadian economy gains a skilled tradesperson - a veteran with proven teamwork, dedication and leadership skills. The civilian employer hiring a veteran is gaining an employee with skills and professional knowledge, and a proven record of learning and adaptability - a win-win. Where retention in the Canadian Armed Forces is not a viable option, I can think of no better outcome.

Thank you again for the privilege of addressing you today. Thank you for the attention you are paying to this critical issue, and to the well-being of Nova Scotia's veterans, and their families.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Lieutenant-Colonel. Thank you all for your opening remarks. There's no doubt we're going to have a very good conversation today. The wealth and knowledge at the table and behind is obviously very clear.

The procedure of this committee is that we normally go questions by hands. As the Chair, I'll keep an order of the questioners. There is an extra microphone, so if any of the questions are for any of the guests who are in the back row, they can come to this microphone on the side to answer any questions.

[2:30 p.m.]

At this point, we will have questions until 3:40 p.m. That gives us about an hour and 10 minutes of questioning. We'll open up the floor. MLA Burrill, you will be the first to ask questions today, sir.

GARY BURRILL: You've all provided such a picture about the importance of support, and the need for support, and of the supports that are being provided. I wonder what you would say about the next level of supports needed. What are the things that we don't have at the moment that are really the next steps to improve the effectiveness of the supports in place? Are there particular things that are kind of right there that we could say, this is what we need to do next?

THE CHAIR: That question is directed to who?

GARY BURRILL: Anyone who might have some comment on it.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Smith.

BRAD SMITH: I think a lot of the systems are in place - I think it's more of it. A lot of this work with an individual veteran has to be somewhat customized. They can't come in from the military and automatically: oh, your technical skills, go challenge the exam. Even though we have, I think, eight trades that they can challenge the exam, they're not going to be able to come in and challenge the exams. There's a lot of one-on-one work, practice work on challenging exams - things like that.

It's those sorts of things to support them on an individual basis as they're working through the transition. I think we do have a lot of some really good pathways in place - it's the resourcing to support them as they move through that pathway.

DON BUREAU: I love the notion from the Lieutenant-Colonel - he mentioned the on-the-job training prior to release. Mr. Young, I think based on your background as a faculty member, you would appreciate that too. You know, there's a buzzword in industry called work-integrated learning or work-integrated experience, where we do take the need of industry - which is for more human capital - and the need of our members leaving the military who become veterans who want to find work.

What we need more of is more of those creative connective tissues happening. Those connective tissues have a wide kind of variety in what they look like. It could be working somewhere for six months. It could be working somewhere for one day a week for

six months. As my colleague Mr. Smith just said, it has to be partners coming together and developing unique, innovative solutions to meet this need. So, Mr. Burrill, I think we need more of that. What we're doing now, we need more of. The good news is the interest is there.

Also, I heard someone say earlier that it was a terrifying transition. I think it was your colleague, Mr. Smith, who said that. I hear that a lot, and for us, it's our responsibility to create a soft landing. How can we create a soft landing for individuals who want to leave this type of life to another one? We need to do more of that also.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms. Johnson-Morrison, do you have a comment?

NICOLE JOHNSON-MORRISON: Thank you for the question, Mr. Burrill. I would say that one of the things I think we see within the department that is needed is something that we are already starting to work on with the Nova Scotia Community College.

One of the things we're looking at is the recognition of prior learning because quite a number of military personnel who are transitioning into civilian life are coming in with different types of skillsets. Really, trying to look at how we can recognize the learning that they have, and also working with the Canadian manufacturers and exporters to try to understand what those skill gaps are that industry is seeing.

For example, we know that many manufacturers might be facing a specific type of skill gap that they need. By working with the Canadian manufacturers and exporters, what we are doing is providing funding to them to help them to tell us where those gaps exist - where it is for industry, and where industry would see the need for specific types of training that military personnel transitioning into civilian careers might want to explore to try to help us to understand how we can better tailor our programs to support them as they come to make that transition.

ROSS BONNELL: Thank you for the question. It is truly an exciting time for me to be part of the Transition Centre team, to be at the transition unit. Strong, secure, engaged, directed - we need to get better at transition. We need to get better at releases. As a result, my higher headquarters Transition Centre in Ottawa was founded only in 2018, so we're talking about a relatively young organization.

What the Transition Centre is putting across Canada is a military-to-civilian transition process. Here in Halifax, that's going to go live on March 1st, 2023 - next year. What that's going to do is it's really going to standardize personal and professional services for all members who are releasing. The fact that members were terrified upon release - this is a story I hear almost daily when speaking to veterans. That won't happen under the military-to-civilian transition process because we're going to centralize all assets related to military transitions under my transition unit.

That's going to go live here in Halifax on the first of March. For the rest of the region, it's going to be into effect by the end of 2024.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I don't know where to start here. It's pretty exciting, actually. A lot of the questions that I was going to ask - and I'll get to them in a second - have kind of been answered by some by the answers to MLA Burrill's question. I first want to say that I have a tremendous amount of friends who are military - active or retired. I sat here and listened to each of you speak about supporting the veterans. I believe that those veterans are an asset to our community today like they have never been before.

We're changing. I don't mean to go preaching here, but we're really changing, and now we're trying to grow our province. We have struggled with skilled trades - that's happened over the last two, three, four years. These are folks who are not just out of high school; these are folks who have spent years in the workforce. Teamwork and dedication are critical.

I'll throw this out to anybody, but I'm thinking of Nova Scotia Community College first. What are we doing specifically to ease that? Maybe the Lieutenant-Colonel can speak to that, or maybe you can all speak to it. What are we doing specifically to ease that, and do you folks ever sit down together? Anyway, I just think this is an opportunity.

THE CHAIR: That's two questions, Mr. Taggart. (Laughter) Mr. Bureaux.

DON BUREAUX: I'll answer the second question first. Do we ever sit down together? The answer is yes. I think one of the advantages that I recognize of being in Nova Scotia when I talk to my peers in the post-secondary sector across Canada is that the smallness of Nova Scotia allows us to partner at a level that is unseen in larger provinces. That makes my job very enjoyable.

In terms of what we are specifically doing - from a granular level, we're going through program by program. We have 140 programs at NSCC. I have a program in front of me right now, a material technician for example. I have a program of vehicle technician and a program of construction technician - just to give three. We have teams who have worked with our partners to go through competency and outcome on a program basis and then map that to the skills that military personnel would get, and then see where we can give them recognition for some of those programs so they can get to the program more quickly.

That's very granular, on-the-ground work that's being done right now that will smooth this transition.

THE CHAIR: Lieutenant-Colonel Bonnell.

ROSS BONNELL: Easy question first. Do we ever work together? Absolutely. I think we need to. Moving forward, I would only like to see a growth of that. For example, last week I conducted some outreach in Sydney, and who was there but Dave from Helmets to Hardhats. We're briefing the same groups of soldiers. We're saying the same message about optimizing their transition - being there as a source of support for them moving forward.

As for the utility of veterans for Nova Scotia, I could not agree more. As I said in my introductory remarks, when a civilian employer hires a veteran, they're gaining not someone out of high school, not someone out of university. They're gaining someone with proven leadership, with proven teamwork abilities, with proven dedication. I don't think that's an asset that can be dismissed. It's your prototypical win/win scenario.

The last point I'll make on that, specific to the NSCC, is that before any Canadian Armed Forces member is released from my unit, I personally sit down with them and ask them about their experiences. For those who have gone through the VRPSM program, and specifically for those who have gone through the NSCC, the feedback I have been receiving is simply outstanding. They genuinely feel set up for success. What that means is that they leave the Canadian Armed Forces with a positive impression, they feel supported by the chain of command, and they're set up for success post release.

I keep coming back to that comment about veterans historically feeling terrified about that next bound. I'm seeing less and less of that now with this current group of new veterans who are releasing out of the transition unit.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Smith.

BRAD SMITH: The coordination, I think, is critical. It goes very well because when you're assessing the individual veteran, they could be a candidate to going through the community college system, or they could be a direct-entry person who goes straight into the trades and gets trained by the individual trade. The apprenticeship agency and the support - all of these pieces have to work together. They each have a role.

The key is in the assessment of the veteran on the pathway. What is the right pathway that is most effective and efficient for that veteran, based on where they are, where they want to go, and what systems are in place to support that.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Johnson-Morrison, would you like to respond as well?

NICOLE JOHNSON-MORRISON: Thank you for that question, Mr. Taggart. I would say that, as everyone has already expressed, we all work together. As a matter of fact, within the apprenticeship agency, Brad happens to be on our board. There is a lot of that cohesion that happens throughout the system. We are always in close contact working with the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency.

We are aware that with the amount of skills that veterans are bringing when they have left their military life, they have a unique opportunity. They have a unique set of skills that is really important for us to think about in terms of what are those sectors that Nova Scotia needs right now. We're all hearing of the struggles for people who are talking about the need for more supports in the construction sector. We know so many veterans are coming with those types of skilled trades that can easily be translated into a relevant Red Seal trade.

For us, we are looking at every avenue where we can help to support veterans who are making that transition. As a matter of fact, we have 50 offices across the entire province that are the Nova Scotia Works offices. Any veteran who is coming out of the military life and making the transition can go into any of those offices and hear about our programs. They can look at them online. They're all free for everyone, for all Nova Scotians who are looking for employment.

Also, we have our Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, where every person who is actually looking to challenge for a Red Seal trade can contact them. They can give them some pointers as it relates to whether they might need additional training or whether they are capable at that point - if they've had enough experience and they've been doing a trade to actually challenge for Red Seal certification.

We recognize that it's not a group of people that we underestimate by any stretch of the imagination. They have really wonderful skill sets, and it's really aligned to where we see the need for economic development for the province.

THE CHAIR: MLA Lachance.

LISA LACHANCE: Thanks so much for being here. I think I have a question that perhaps many of you can answer, so I'll launch the question and then we'll just go down the line.

In terms of these release programs, particularly to trades, I'm wondering what sort of gender analysis is done in terms of supporting diversity of candidates coming out of the Forces. Maybe this is more directly to you, but what specific needs or supports are you finding amongst women or gender-diverse folks who are leaving and wanting to pursue the trades?

THE CHAIR: Lieutenant-Colonel Bonnell.

ROSS BONNELL: Gender-based analysis informs every single piece of direction that is released from my headquarters and, in fact, from my higher headquarters. We need to deliver all of our services with a view to supporting males and females. When I look at the number of veterans in my unit, it's across every rank, across every region in Canada, men and women. Absolutely, yes, gender-based analysis informs every piece of direction and all programs that are delivered by my headquarters.

BRAD SMITH: It's an excellent question. If it's a female vet, for example, there are parallel programs to support those individuals. There's the Office to Advance Women Apprentices, and we have specialists in Indigenous affairs.

[2:45 p.m.]

Just being a vet is not the only definition for that person. As you discover other parts of that individual, whatever that might be, there are parallel support systems already in existence for underrepresented groups. The trades are male-dominated, but there's a lot of good work underway to support more diversity and inclusion in the trades, so a veteran is identified in that way. There are a number of support programs by the apprenticeship agency, the community college, and many organizations to support that at the same time.

DON BUREAUX: That's such a great question, and I'll get a bit nerdy here when it comes to educational theory for a moment. There are different schools of thought in terms of how you bring people into a learning environment and how they come out. One is you create barriers at the beginning, so people have to reach certain barriers to get in, and there are core requirements to graduate and get out. There are other systems - and we've used this term today - where you meet learners where they are, which could be in different places, and the outcome requirements are the same. So they begin the pathway at different places.

One thing that I have so enjoyed in being an educational leader in Nova Scotia is that there's a common philosophy in this province of trying to meet learners where they are, and then create systems for them to get to a common outcome. That's a game changer. I'm proud to do what I do because we're focused on democratising post-secondary education, post-secondary learning, apprenticeship learning, higher education. It doesn't matter - we're here to democratise that, and I think everyone wins. I'm very, very pleased that's the approach that we take in the province of Nova Scotia.

NICOLE JOHNSON-MORRISON: Thank you, MLA Lachance, for that question. I think for the work that we do, we understand at a deep, intrinsic level the importance of ensuring underrepresented groups are included in Nova Scotia's future. In terms of the programs that are delivered through the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, we are continuously taking hard looks to see how we can be more specifically open to ensuring that we are supporting underrepresented groups, to try to create those pathways for those persons to see themselves in the future of Nova Scotia.

We know that there's more work to be done. We're looking to always take feedback and try to do better. It really is a priority for us. It's a priority because of the fact that in some cases, it really does make huge economic sense for the Province to be thinking about making sure that everyone is included in the development of the economy, but it's also the right thing to do.

We are also ensuring that as we look more broadly as to how our programs could be continuously more inclusive, that that is part of the beginning. For any type of new approach, we're thinking of that as a beginning step and not as an afterthought.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Next is MLA Jessome.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Thanks, everyone, for your time and energy on each of your respective roles. I'm curious about the statement - and I think I heard this correctly - that there are eight particular roles that seamlessly transition from military service to civilian workforce. Am I accurate to say there's only eight?

THE CHAIR: That's your question, MLA Jessome?

BEN JESSOME: I was hoping for clarification so that I could ask my question.

THE CHAIR: I'll ask Mr. Smith, if you could answer that question.

BRAD SMITH: Yes, there are eight that they can automatically challenge the Red Seal Exam for. So there's a pathway to eight. We were actually just having a discussion before the meeting . . . (Interruption) Nine, sorry. I missed one. Marjorie Davison and I will be in Ontario for the national meetings for the Red Seal next week, and we're going to bring this to their attention and see if we can get more. Again, just having it recognized doesn't mean you move straight in. There's a lot of work that has to happen before they can challenge that exam, and those are the support pieces that you need to do that.

There's clearly this type of carpenter in the military, construction carpenter. There are some direct ones. There are 60 trades, and we need to be doing more of that kind of work to identify more of those opportunities.

BEN JESSOME: Thank you. In the work that goes on to make those transitions more consistent, frequent and available, what's the goal of the work? Is it to get to a situation where there are more challenge-the-exam-ready situations? Would it be appropriate to say we want to pick two more this year and try to get them to a point where folks who are transitioning to civilian service could challenge these exams?

What's the goal around that mandate or that work that takes place? If I'm not being clear enough, I'd be happy to try explain it another way.

BRAD SMITH: To have somebody come out of the military at 38 years of age and put them as a first-year apprentice is inappropriate. Our goal is to get them far enough in that learning pathway so they can be a Red Seal journey person as quickly as possible. It's really finding out where they are, as Mr. Bureaux identified, what the gaps are, how quickly can we close those gaps and get their Red Seal certification, therefore making the income and being recognized for the skill sets they have.

They all start at a different point and we meet them where they are. The goal is how quickly we can get them certified so they're making the maximum revenue and maximum opportunity in the trades. I trust that's answered the question.

THE CHAIR: Is there anybody else who would like to respond to the question? Lieutenant-Colonel Bonnell.

ROSS BONNELL: The slogan of the transition group is: personalized, professional, and standardized. I think what I'll emphasize here is personalized. For any member releasing from the Canadian Armed Forces, no two members' needs are the same. No two transition plans are the same. Different transitions plans meet the needs of different members. It's important to have a personalized approach at all times.

When looking at what the ultimate goal is of the transition plan, it really is addressing those seven domains of wellness. That might be what you were referring to previously - so finances, social integration, life skills, housing, culture, health, sense of purpose. A transition plan is successful when a veteran is set up for success along each of those domains of wellness.

That's why I said earlier: a transition plan that includes a transition to a skilled trade is so indicative of a successful transition plan, because it directly addresses so many of those domains of wellness.

THE CHAIR: MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: As a former faculty member at NSCC, as well as a Red Seal tradesperson, I see a ton of transferrable skills here - whether it's in piping or welding or something else. When you mentioned on-the-job training or work-integrated learning, I wonder if that's by design. All those things could RPL.

I'll put one more footnote here. I did work with several people who were in the military who seamlessly did transition into the trades out west when I was there in the piping sector. My question is to Lieutenant-Colonel Bonnell, and it's about the VRPSM. I'm looking for more information on that. Anticipating someone is going to transition from the military service into the trades, are you working with stuff on the front end to make sure it seamlessly transitions?

ROSS BONNELL: Thank you so much for the question. I'm glad you asked about VRPSM. That's a program that has seen a tremendous amount of success. I'll give you a basic overview and then I'll hand it off to my services manager, Ms. Clattenburg.

VRPSM is specifically for medically releasing personnel. We have a number of release categories in the Canadian Armed Forces. Those who are releasing on a medical item would qualify for VRPSM. If we have a member and we know that member is going to be releasing on a certain date, they can start either on-the-job training with a civilian

employer or vocational rehab six months prior to that. We have members right now on VRPSM who are actually at the community collage, and the feedback I've been receiving, again, simply outstanding.

It's a program that's seen a tremendous amount of success. For more specifics, I'll hand it off to Sandra.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Clattenburg.

SANDRA CLATTENBURG: Good afternoon, everyone. I work at the Transition Centre. I manage a section there. We have six service coordinators. We are often meeting with transitioning members to assist them in developing a successful pre- and post-release plan.

With our medically releasing members, VRPSM is a great opportunity for transitioning members to start an educational program six months prior to their release date. Oftentimes, that's in coordination with funding through one of our partners, SISIP. They offer a two-year wage replacement program, and they also offer funding for retraining. I don't want to speak to their program. I just know some general information about it, so I'll mention that.

The great thing about it is that it allows members to start school with sponsorship through SISIP, or they can try out a career path that they feel they may be interested in. You don't want to sign up to be an electrician if you have never done that type of work before. It gives members an opportunity to try out a trade or do some on-the-job training and job shadowing in an area, and then decide if they want to pursue that as a career. Some members do a combination of schooling and on-the-job training or job shadowing. It's a great program.

ROSS BONNELL: Just to add to that, VRPSM has seen a lot of growth over the last couple of years. In 2018, there were 32 members enrolled in a VRPSM program. Currently, there are 57. That's just in Nova Scotia. It's seen a lot of growth, and again, the feedback I've received has been wholly positive.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: My question is for Mr. Giannou. You're right - I'd like to say that first, as someone who was raised in the military. I saw my father retire and then go back in - he was offered another post and he took it, because what are you going to do? But I also know we're getting better, because my brother was also Navy, and the transition for him was much smoother.

I want to talk to you about Helmets to Hardhats. I had no idea about this, and then I found out about it about two years ago, and I appreciate it so much. Back in June, Helmets to Hardhats presented at the Mainland Nova Scotia Building Trades annual conference.

Can you tell me a bit more about the presentation - how it was received, and the role that these conferences take in promoting Helmets to Hardhats and the work you do?

[3:00 p.m.]

DAVE GIANNOU: Thank you, ma'am. That's a great question. It actually segues into something that's near and dear to my heart, which is communication.

As I said, 36 years in the Navy. Every exercise I've seen fail, failed on communication. I see a lot of that here - not of failure. I see that we're trying to improve it. That's where we need to go. There are a lot of great programs being offered through NSCC, through Building Trades, through the apprenticeship-opportunity organizations. Not enough people know about them.

I've been with Helmets to Hardhats for almost two years. That's one of the things that we've started to improve - getting the word out. These programs are fantastic, but only if people know about them and can work on them.

As for the conferences, yes. I spoke at Mainland Building Trades Conference last Summer. From that, I had several of the employers come up to me and talk about opportunities that they would like to get posted on our website. So we work with the unionized employers, and we post some of their opportunities.

Our primary focus is to allow veterans to transition to the trades because of the need for tradespeople in Canada, but a secondary piece of that is there are a lot of opportunities in these organizations for people who have skill sets: logistic skill sets, HR skill sets, administrative skill sets, leadership/supervisory skill sets. Those opportunities - project planner estimators, project managers - are being posted on our websites for veterans as well.

It comes back to communications. We go to the conference, and we talk to the unions, the employers, and all the attendees at the conferences. I talk at a SCAN seminar - Second Career Assistance Network. All military people who are releasing should be going to these seminars to hear about the programs that are available to them. Helmets to Hardhats is just one, but it's an option for them.

I spoke in Sydney last week to one of the reserve units. The reserve unit's a little harder to get out to because there are so many of them, but we do reach out as best we can to get the information out. That's the purpose of the travel and reaching out to the people. It's to let them know what's available out there for them. This is a valuable program, and it gives our veterans some options that they didn't know about.

And back to the terrified "yes." Forty years ago, when I joined, the Navy was a different place. It has grown immensely over the past 40 years. I've seen huge improvements where we actually started taking better care of our people, and this is part of

it. So thank you today for this forum. We still have a way to go, but communication is key. Getting the word out to what programs are out there to our veterans, to the industry, to the employers so they know what they can take advantage of as well. I hope that answers your question.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Bureaux - just before you answer, it was asked about follow-up questions. Normally in our committee, I allow for a quick follow-up to a previous question, but there's such good engagement with our entire table here today on every question that I think we won't allow for follow-up questions. I'll make sure that you get put on for a secondary question, but I think the engagement of the entire table answering all the questions - I think it's more beneficial for us to hear you speak and give your insights. We won't allow for follow-ups today, okay?

DON BUREAUX: I was just sitting here inspired by the question and the response by Mr. Giannou, and I was reminded of a term I heard from a colleague. A commanding officer described the military as a "force multiplier," that's what a good military does. It's a force multiplication organization. I know in our organization, we employ over 2,000 people, so not only do we help people transition out of the military into a trades career, we want them to come work for us. If they'll come work for us and bring their passion and their skill to be a force multiplier by teaching, mentoring and guiding our students, that's a win.

I was on a phone call yesterday with a colleague of mine who's a president of a trade school in Canada. He's a retired military member, and now he's a president of a college in this country. He's a force multiplier in terms of his passion and his work. I would just ask that we think about the opportunities for these incredibly talented women and men to be transitioned, not only into frontline trades positions, but also positions like what Mr. Young held - of future mentors and teachers, and how we can help facilitate them working at Mr. Smith's organization, my organization, and be creative in how we employ them.

THE CHAIR: MLA Harrison, you're next.

LARRY HARRISON: First of all, I want to acknowledge the level of commitment, and the level of energy that you folks put into helping these vets, military personnel transition into the trades.

I think Mr. Smith used the word "barriers." I wonder if you could elaborate on the barriers that the vets and the military personnel face as they try to make that transition into the trades, and I'm going to risk myself here and ask another question. How can we as a government remove some of those barriers or minimize some of those barriers?

THE CHAIR: I see how you did that. You got two into one. That's how you get away from the follow-up. That's good. Who would like to respond to that first? Mr. Smith.

BRAD SMITH: I'll just frame it up and then maybe I'll ask my colleague, Mr. Giannou - because he's on the front every day. I would just say that the trades for any veteran, new Canadian, underrepresented group - any of these individuals - have unique challenges from where they're coming from in various ways. A barrier for one might not be a barrier for another. Again, it comes back to Mr. Bureaux's comments and many comments, it's meeting those people where they are. It's not an easy transition. It's not like you're coming out of high school and saying, I'm gung-ho, I'm going to do that. These people have had a whole career.

To face a career transition and say, what do you mean I have to be a first-year apprentice at \$20 an hour when I'm 40 years of age, and I've got a house, a mortgage and kids? I have not been in a learning environment for many years in terms of that. It is on an individual basis, but maybe Dave can speak to some of the things he deals with on a daily basis.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Giannou.

DAVE GIANNOU: I'm not sure where to start. There are so many barriers that we face leaving the military. A lot of us join at an early age, so it becomes our lifestyle. We're uniformed, we're fed, told what to do, where to go, when to do it. You have education blocks through your career. You're expected to advance, and you do. You rise to the level that you can.

When you walk out of that into the civilian world, it's not quite as organized or scheduled. That's one challenge we do face. Bringing our skills and experience out is a huge challenge - trying to understand what we bring with us. That's a conversation I have with veterans every day: don't underestimate yourself, don't undersell yourself. The leadership ability you bring - your work ethic.

I hear from employers on a regular basis that they love getting vets because they know how to work, they show up on time, and they know how to put their boots on, which are key elements in the workforce - being there. I know there's a huge absenteeism rate in various workforces. Our military people show up on time. If you're not five minutes early, you're 10 minutes late.

As my colleague Brad indicated, there are a lot of other challenges, economic challenges. Getting out after 20 years, paying into EI - and this is a bit of a stickler for me - paying into EI my entire career and not being able to draw it when I get out. You can't go into a trade program - I shouldn't say can't, because I don't know absolutely. There are hard issues getting into a trade without having that support system. That's something maybe the transition group will be able to speak to as well.

Again, it's education. The transition group is doing a fantastic job over the last four years, starting to educate people on what programs and services are available. Four years ago, when I got out, I was challenged. I wasn't sure where I was going to go. I have a

mortgage, I have a wife and family, car payments, and unsure of what skill sets I'm bringing with me - what experience I'm bringing with me, and how that transitions into a civilian job. Helping the veterans now and explaining to them what they do bring with them, and showing them how industry and the trades want them - really need them. Their life skills transition very well into these trades. It helps the veterans. I hope that answers some of your question, sir.

THE CHAIR: MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Lieutenant-Colonel Bonnell, you referenced a vocational rehab program - I don't know the exact title - where there was supplementary engagement in a civilian profession for a period of time, either transitioning out or during military service. I'm wondering if that program is limited to folks who are being medically released. If it's not, is it something that can be applied more widely to transitioning service members? Is there a partnership to be made with organizations like the Building Trades to identify particular trades that fall into a labour shortage category?

ROSS BONNELL: VRPSM, or Vocational Rehabilitation Program for Serving Members, is specifically for members who are releasing medically. These are members who already have a date of release set in stone, aiming to set them up for success the day after that release. VRPSM is aimed at providing them with on-the-job experience or education, but it is for members who are medically released.

For non-medically releasing members, there's a host of other programs available. We work with SISIP and we work with VAC to ensure that these members are set up for success. I think it is important to note though, that for non-medically releasing members, the optimal outcome for us is always retention. It is retention, retention, retention. That was nested within the Chief of Defence Staff's order on reconstitution, which was just released last month.

We are 10,000 members short. So if we can come to terms around a transition plan with a serving member that sees that member remain in the Canadian Armed Forces, that to me is success. That, to me, is an optimal outcome.

BRAD SMITH: One other thing I would point out is that one of the challenges we face is the apprenticeship systems and labour as a provincial jurisdiction. We're dealing with the Canadian Armed Forces, and we have a national Helmets to Hardhats program. But I will say there's been a lot of really good work done on harmonization of the trades across the country. That then makes it easier for these transitions across the country. A lot of the work that I was doing provincially, it took many years before we could get that DND 404 licensing to drive a bus or a transport truck. That took many, many years. I think it's in every jurisdiction in the country, and that was an easy win.

These other ones are going to be more challenging and takes more coordination, more harmonization in an environment where we have national and provincial jurisdiction, and no central hammer to make it all magically harmonize the same across the board.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Mr. Giannou, I'm going to talk to you again, as well as Mr. Smith and Lieutenant-Colonel Bonnell. Over the last hour or so, you have kind of highlighted some of the things that you're doing to attract military members. I'm just wondering, what more do you think could be done to highlight opportunities in the trades for our military members and veterans? How do you think you get better at communicating? I came from municipal government, and I understand communication, communication, communication. It's not always grabbed and received, so I'm just wondering if you guys could kind of tell me a little bit about that.

BRAD SMITH: First of all, I'll say that the Helmets to Hardhats program has just recently hired a communications director. If you follow the Helmets to Hardhats Twitter feed, you would have seen several tweets just this week on different programs and different initiatives that are under way.

As Dave referred to - you're right. Communication, getting the information out there in an environment where we're hit with probably 15,000 to 20,000 messages a day - how do you break through on this? Again, it's the broad communication. I think it's also what Helmets to Hardhats is doing, which is going out there every day and meeting, and being at those transition pieces. I couldn't agree with you more. It is all about communication, and they're ramping that up, but it will never be enough.

NICOLE JOHNSON-MORRISON: Thank you for the question, MLA Barkhouse. I want to say that it's a really important thing for the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration. One of the things that we've been doing is really trying to tailor our broader marketing to try to attract military personnel who are transitioning into civilian careers that are all across Canada. We know that many of them have some ties in some way to the east coast and might want to come home.

So when we do our marketing campaigns, one of the things we do is specifically try to talk about the MOST program, which is the program that was launched a few months ago that really does target helping persons who are under 30 years old. For the first \$58,000 on their earnings, they can have a tax rebate if they are under 30 years old. That is a way that we're saying to persons, if you're considering transitioning out of a military career - or for anyone - they could consider this program.

We also try to ensure that when we are marketing our programs across Canada, we're really talking to all the jurisdictions of all provinces to say, you might want to consider moving to Nova Scotia. If you do, here are the benefits that you can have, like the

MOST program, which is really a unique program that we are certainly seeing a lot of interest in.

[3:15 p.m.]

One thing I want to share is that we've had 102 million views on our campaign, so we know that the campaign is very tailored to help people look at Nova Scotia. It's really resonating. A big part of that is also trying to look at the military personnel who might be interested in transitioning into civilian careers.

THE CHAIR: Lieutenant-Colonel, and then Mr. Bureaux.

ROSS BONNELL: When I had the privilege of assuming command of the unit back in April, I identified three key priorities. The first was optimizing support to the injured. That trumps all. The third was a military-to-civilian transition process, which I discussed briefly, about expanding our support to non-medically releasing. The second priority was education and outreach.

We're still a relatively young organization. The transition group was founded back in 2018. I still think there's a bit of a misunderstanding within the military about the full suite of services we provide. That's why I privilege education and outreach as a top priority.

So what does that mean? I know the transition group in Ottawa has developed a national-level strategy to get information out across to all members of the Canadian Armed Forces, but locally, to me it means education and outreach. Initially, the first couple of months that I was in command, it meant going to command teams - office calls, introducing myself, engaging leadership.

I've actually found it was a lot more productive for me to be speaking to the troops, to get out to speak to ships' companies, to speak to infantry companies, to speak to battalions, to actually deliver the message directly to serving members about how this is what we do at transition unit, and this is the suite of services we provide.

DON BUREAUX: Vice Chair Barkhouse, again, I love the question. I'm just going to flip it a little bit. We talked a lot about communication being a push - you're pushing the communication down. I think it's important to get a pull, too. What I mean by that is, we need to work with the small- and medium-sized business sector in Province of Nova Scotia who are so busy right now that attracting talent is something that is tough for them to do, because there's so much business out there.

Imagine if we could continue to work with the Chambers of Commerce and say to them to inform their members about this amazing talent pool that exists of exiting military personnel. I chaired a committee for the Halifax Chamber of Commerce for a number of years with the military at the table to work with other members - for them to be on the

lookout. If you're looking to hire, if you're a small independent contractor, you need really reliable human capital. First of mind should be looking for a military veteran.

That created a pull. It brought the system into communication in a different way. I think we should look at it from both angles. Does that make sense?

DAVE GIANNOU: MLA Barkhouse, thank you for that question. It is a great question. It's challenging. Again, communications - one thing I want to say is that our program, Helmets to Hardhats, is targeting the veterans. We want the people who are releasing and moving on. We're not at odds with the transition group, because we all served. We're all veterans. We're not trying to draw people out of the military into the trades, into a satisfying second career. We want to offer that option when they're ready to move on.

How do you do that communication? SCAN seminars? Yes, that's the people who are releasing and moving on. I can't go to the bases. I would be kicked out, and I wouldn't go, to start with. The reserve units are a great opportunity, because they can serve both masters. They can continue to serve and build a satisfying career in a second trade, so we are working with them.

We're also working with the cadet organizations. We're trying to get out to the Summer camps within the next year or so. At 19 years of age, the cadets have to leave the cadet organization and move on. Some will move on to post-secondary education, some will move into a job, and there's about a third that aren't sure what they want to do. At 19, it's a great opportunity to get into a trade.

The average age of the veterans we're working with getting into the trades now is 32 to 34 years old at any given month.

THE CHAIR: Almost sounded like a mic-drop moment. My next three speakers, I have MLA Taggart, MLA Young, and MLA Burrill. MLA Taggart, you're next.

TOM TAGGART: Again, it's a pretty exciting conversation we have going here. For Mr. Smith, I may have missed some of this, but I just want to give you the opportunity. Can you tell us more about the members you represent and share opportunities that you're seeing from a hiring perspective for military and veterans looking to get into a post-service career in trades? Is there anything there that we haven't . . .

THE CHAIR: Mr. Smith.

BRAD SMITH: The building trades, because of its structure, is always recruiting, training, and supporting members in there. You have 13 unions in this province. Just about every trade is involved, 11,000 workers, about 300 contractors. One of the opportunities we have is because we have direct connectivity from the labour demand to labour supply. Our mandate is to supply our contractors with skilled tradespeople. The Helmets to

Hardhats program is so important to us because it is one of our critical channels of recruiting and training tradespeople for our contractors.

THE CHAIR: MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: My question is to Mr. Smith. In July, our government announced changes to the amendments of the Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Act that would allow a journey person to take on more - it would change the ratios. I'm just wondering what feedback you may have been hearing from your members. Perhaps ADM Johnson-Morrison may be able to speak on how these changes were received by the industry as well.

BRAD SMITH: I think a lot of it depends on the trade. There are some trades where that makes complete sense. Some other trades, some of our contractors will not go that way with the ratios because of the concerns about quality of training and safety. It's really dependent on the trade. In some of the trades it's an opportunity, in some of the others - but again, that's about being flexible, and that's about being responsive to the industry, and it's about being, again, specific to the trade and the opportunities for the trade.

NICOLE JOHNSON-MORRISON: What I would say is that what we have heard, the feedback that we've gotten from industry was very well-received. We've gotten a lot of positive feedback so far. We know that this decision was very industry-driven in terms of the decision to move from the previous ratio to having a two-to-one.

I know that we do have some additional feedback. I want to invite my colleague, Marjorie Davison, to also jump in to share some information.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Davison.

MARJORIE DAVISON: I think I will elaborate a little bit on what Mr. Smith has indicated. The training ratio is for all sectors and not just construction. The building trades operate within the construction sector, but the apprenticeship system covers also the manufacturing, industrial, the mode of power, and the service sectors. There were already a number of variants in ratio in other trades. Sometimes that ratio actually surpasses the one-to-two. It may be one-to-three or one-to-four. It is dependent, as Mr. Smith said, on what the need is within the trade.

Consultations were had. This was part of the response to the affordability in housing to ensure that labour force is available, and the opportunities are there for apprentices. I think overall the measure was well understood by industry. I think industry understood what government's intent was. However, I think there will be some trades that will come forward through the apprenticeship board, and the board is addressing that through our process.

It may be that an industry may ask to vary that ratio. They can vary it higher or lower, but I think there'll be a fair process in place to ensure there's consensus among all the industry representatives.

BRAD SMITH: One of the challenges we have with apprentices is that many employers want the third- and fourth-year apprentice - they don't want the first-year apprentice. Getting the first-year apprentices out and working is one of the challenges.

THE CHAIR: MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: Thank you. I was just wanting to go back to Mr. Smith and Mr. Giannou, perhaps, about this general world of the transferability of trades. I think I'm not the only person in the civilian world who finds the description of military trades strange and unfamiliar. If you ask someone about what they do in the military, they provide you a name that you've never heard before, and you have to ask a lot of questions to get some sense about their work.

I'm just trying to understand the general transferability of trades. You've spoken about nine challengeable accreditations. In general, when we look at the world of civilian trades and the world of military trades, are we talking about more or less direct transferability of, say, like half, or a majority, or a minority? What is the lay of the land here?

BRAD SMITH: I think when you talk about some of the skillsets around leadership, teamwork, showing up for work, and things like that, it's 100 per cent. When you start getting into the technical side, when you're looking at a combat weapon's system versus something in the civilian world, I don't know whether I can answer that. It's not just that the names are different, it's actually what they're doing - an electrician on a ship versus an electrician on a construction site. That's where you get into the minutiae of what particular skill sets of this individual is transferable, and where the gaps are.

DAVE GIANNOU: MLA Burrill, some of the issues that we have are a lot of our trades - there's not a civilian equivalent. Combat arms - infantry, artillery, tank drivers - there's not a lot of call for that in the civilian world. A lot of those guys and gals are coming out looking for trades, looking for opportunities, and this is where we can talk to them about what's available out there. They are starting fresh.

I would say a lot of our registered clients working with Helmets to Hardhats don't have skill sets or experience in the trade they're going into, but they do have the discipline. They have the work ethic; they have the leadership. We train in the military at a very early age how to learn, how to listen, how to move forward and take orders. It works very well when you're transitioning into a trade because a lot of the trades out there are very dangerous.

Our more technical trades transfer a little easier: the marine engineers, the electricians, or cooks. There are direct challenges for Red Seal when you reach your QL5 - which is your completion of your trades training - you can challenge the Red Seal exam. But as Mr. Smith said, and he's correct: an electrician on a ship is not the same as an electrician in industry. While he'll have the background technical trades, he doesn't have those practical skills, and that's where a lot of the gap is. That's where we need to look at for transition: the gap between a navy profession and a civilian profession which is similar.

[3:30 p.m.]

It's a challenge for our members to get out there. Been an electrician for 20 years in the navy, trying to move into an electrician industry, learning how to work with other industrial electricians in that environment. That's a lot of challenge there.

ROSS BONNELL: Just to echo those comments. I'm an infantry officer. While from the outside looking in, the trade may not be as easily transferable as other trades within the military. Even me, there's a long laundry list of courses, which I have taken, which would easily be transferable. You discussed DND 404s. Driving a military vehicle, a truck, is the same if it's green as if it's blue. The safety courses that we discussed, gender-based analysis - my entire team has conducted a gender-based analysis course. These are easily transferable to the civilian sector.

THE CHAIR: I'll go to MLA Harrison, and we have about 10 minutes left of questioning.

LARRY HARRISON: We've talked a lot about the vets and the military personnel making that transition. What can you tell us about supports for the spouses of those folks?

ROSS BONNELL: I'm going to speak to that, and then again, I'm going to hand it off to Ms. Clattenburg. We were actually discussing this earlier this morning. At every base, you're going to find a Military Family Resource Centre. Here in Halifax, it's located at Windsor Park - the MFRC. There are resources in each MFRC delivering support to the families, the spouses, the children, et cetera. I'm going to hand it off there to Ms. Clattenburg to further develop that response.

SANDRA CLATTENBURG: As Lieutenant-Colonel Bonnell mentioned, we do have the Military Family Resource Centre. Recently, within the last four to five years, a veteran family coordinator was hired. Her role is to work with families as their loved one transitions out of the CAF, and provide them with different resources and workshops that can help them. It's been acknowledged that it's a transition for the family. Yes, it's a change for the member, but it's a change for the family as well.

At the transition centre, we also have a family liaison officer. She is a service partner who works with us and supports our clients, and anyone we refer her way. She's

basically a social worker, and can provide things like short-term counselling and referrals to the community. She's a great resource that we have as well.

I will just say that we encourage members, when they come in to meet with us, to be inclusive and include their families. I know personally, when my husband and I go to a meeting at the bank or somewhere, he'll remember things that I don't, or I'll catch things that he doesn't. We encourage members to bring a family member or a support person when they meet with us at the transition centre, as well as to various appointments with service providers on base.

There's a lot of work being done in that area. The veteran family coordinator has just put out a workshop called Shifting Gears that is developed specifically for transitioning members and their families.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ince.

HON. TONY INCE: Actually, my question was pretty much answered by Mr. Jessome and by Mr. Burrill when you talked about transitioning. I was going to ask about challenging the Red Seal, like a vehicle technician, a supply technician, combat arms, but you've already answered all of that.

My question then will go to Lieutenant-Colonel Bonnell. What are some of the challenges in terms of that retention - what is it that's causing people to leave? Are there better-paying jobs? Are you looking at raising the pay for the members? Help me understand.

ROSS BONNELL: I do want to stay within my lane here. I can't necessarily speak to national issues such as pay. What I will speak to though, is the feedback I'm receiving from members. Like I said, I sit down with every single member of my unit before they release. Part of the interview I conduct with them is to unpack why they're leaving the Canadian Armed Forces.

I've been harping on the idea that no transition plan, or members' needs, are the same. It needs to be personalized. I would say that the reason members do choose to release from the Canadian Armed Forces - they're not the same. There are a whole host of reasons. Some are releasing medically, so it's pretty clear that they no longer meet universality of services, so they release. For those members, we offer them the whole suite of services to ensure that they're successful post release.

Some members only signed up with a view to serve four years. They joined up with a desire to serve this nation for four years. They've done that, and in their mind they're ready to transition to the next phase of their life. Some members, for sure, are transitioning out because of family reasons. It is a fact that military life often involves postings. Some members have decided that they want to move on to the next phase of their life because they're done with postings.

The feedback I'm receiving from members is very diverse as to why they're getting out. But I'll come back to the point that if retention within the Canadian Armed Forces is an option, that is the optimal outcome for us. If we can identify that during an exit interview - if we could make this happen, would retention back in the Forces would be an option - then that's something that we're going to unpack with the member.

THE CHAIR: MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: This question, perhaps, is directed to the left side of the table. Respecting the fact that the military wants to retain its members - I think I was perhaps a little naïve to think that there was this other way of transition that may involve shipping members out, but I appreciate the motivation and the mission.

I'm curious how labour demand is invested into the work that is done at the community college and the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration with respect to recruiting folks who are transitioning out of the military. The most obvious one that comes to mind is that of skilled trades as it pertains to building houses. We're in an unprecedented time where housing is unbelievably short, and we need to build - for lack of the specific numbers on hand - twice as many houses annually as what we're capable of building collectively right now. What we're hearing from industry is that recruiting skilled labour is a challenge.

To Mr. Bureaux and Ms. Johnson-Morrison, can you weigh in on how that labour need adapts your marketing or outreach scheme generally, and then perhaps with respect to military transition?

THE CHAIR: Ladies first. Ms. Johnson-Morrison.

NICOLE JOHNSON-MORRISON: Thank you for that question, MLA Jessome. For the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, it really does drive a lot of what it is that we do. Industry tells us what the demand is.

We know that construction is a huge sector that's in demand right now. We also know that there is an actual equivalent - there's a construction technician within the military and there's a construction trade. For most people coming with that type of experience, it would be very easy for us to say, do you have the required years of experience that we feel would allow for you to challenge for the Red Seal trades?

If they do, then perfect - they go ahead and they challenge for the Red Seal trades. As a matter of fact, the trade-qualifier fee is waived for military personnel. Basically, all they pay is \$148 to write the exam. So that is a way that we are specifically targeting those persons.

We also know that there are some people who might be interested in a trade, and they might have done some form of construction within the army, but they don't know

exactly if they've had enough experience. We would also want to work with them to ensure they are aware that there is a pathway where our apprenticeship agency is working with them to get them the required skilled trades that actually help them to ultimately be able to challenge for a Red Seal trade at some point, but they might need a bit more skill development.

We're listening to industry, first of all. Second of all, ensuring that we are looking to find ways to make it easier for military, like the waiving of the trade qualifier fees. Also, trying to find ways by which we can support them through that journey by providing that additional training that might help them to decide. Maybe they've had some training in construction, but they may be more interested in another field of trade.

It's trying to assess to understand what that need is to ensure that people have fulfilling careers. That is really how we approach the entire thing, but of course, just very driven by what industry is saying to us as well.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Bureaux, would you like to weigh in on that?

DON BUREAUX: If I may for a minute. Very similarly, the demand by industry is one of the primary factors that goes into our programming decisions. We often are asked, if you have a large wait-list for a particular program, why don't you just double the intake? Well, that's not the solution because there has to be employment at the other end, so there's a science to this. Generally, that predictive analysis of where industry is going to need labour determines where we'll offer our programs.

Then we begin to partner with the sources of that labour - participating in information sessions with the Canadian Armed Forces to make sure that they know of the options. It would be consistent with any kind of pool of labour. New Canadians would obviously be a pool that we'd be very interested in. Communities who have faced traditional barriers to employment - our African Nova Scotian and Indigenous communities. The mosaic of possible sources of labour would be broad, and the military would certainly be a big one.

THE CHAIR: The time is now 3:41 p.m., so that will conclude our question and answer period. I think I speak for everybody here that we could spend another two hours having a conversation here about this. It's been a fascinating meeting.

We do have committee business that our committee needs to attend to, but I would like to offer our guests at the table a chance to have some closing remarks. I'll just ask you to keep them fairly brief so that we can attend to our committee business.

We'll begin with Ms. Johnson-Morrison.

NICOLE JOHNSON-MORRISON: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to actually give some closing remarks. I think for my closing remarks, I want to just share a specific success story that I didn't have an opportunity to do when we were talking.

We have a case where a person that has transitioned out of the military, and I'll just find his name so I don't mispronounce it - Mr. Corey Lucas. He has gone through plumbing in the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency trades. He has basically gone into working now for a plumbing company called GoPro here in Nova Scotia.

What was really interesting about his journey is that he's at the stage right now where he was able to benefit from that trade qualifier waiver that I mentioned. He was able to bring on a registered apprentice who's working with him right now, and he is ultimately looking to start his own business. These are the potential opportunities that are available for military who are transitioning into civilian trades.

For us, looking at that as a success story and realizing that here is someone who probably, when he was in the military, was not sure what he was going to do next. So it's really nice to see that he's actually on a path, gotten his Red Seal trades, has his own apprentice, and is actually thinking about opening a business at some point. This is a segment of Nova Scotia's population - of Canada's population - that it's really important for us to keep working for and keep supporting.

It was really a lovely experience to be here today. Thank you for the invitation to be able to talk about the programs that we have at the department. I appreciate the opportunity to hear from you all and to take the questions today.

DON BUREAUX: Again, I want to say thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm very bullish about the future of this province and the economy of this province. It's often described as a world where we're in the midst of what they call the fourth industrial revolution, and this revolution that we're in right now, the most important input is human capital, talent, a skilled workforce. I think Nova Scotia can compete with the best in the world because we have the best talent in the world - and a big source of that great talent is our military.

I will commit to continuing to work as an institutional partner with my colleagues here to make sure that we create pathways for the incredibly talented military service personnel that we have to help Nova Scotia be the best we can be.

BRAD SMITH: I would just say that for every complicated problem there's a simple solution that is usually wrong. (Laughter) I really do appreciate the opportunity to be here today to talk with you, so that the policy makers have an understanding of the issues, the challenges, and the complexities. I certainly do appreciate being engaged in this conversation so that we can help you make more informed decisions. Thank you so much for this opportunity.

[3:45 p.m.]

ROSS BONNELL: As a closing statement, I only want to reiterate my thanks to the committee for the privilege of addressing you today. I feel that the mission of this committee and my mission at the transition unit are very much linked. It's about creating empowered and enabled veterans. I want to thank each and every one of you for the attention you're paying to the wellbeing of Nova Scotia's veterans and to their families.

THE CHAIR: Once again, thank you all for coming to our meeting today. We do have committee business we have to attend to, so we'll just take a couple minutes to have our guests leave us. If there's any contact information that you'd like to leave on the table anywhere for any of the members, that would be great. We look forward to seeing you again.

[3:46 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[3:48 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. We'll get back to our committee business here. The time is 3:49 p.m. The item on my committee business of our agenda - it was requested at one of our previous meetings to have a list of previous witnesses going back a few years compiled by our clerk. I believe our clerk has distributed that to all the members of the committee. Is there any discussion or conversation around the list that was sent out by our clerk, as requested? MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I think we're missing Clannad Counselling and Consulting and the Mood Disorders Society of Canada. Those were from our September meeting.

THE CHAIR: I think the clerk has made note of that. Maybe we'll just have a corrected list redistributed back to the committee.

Is there any other business? MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I believe that the motion I'm going to refer to has been circulated to all committee members. I don't know whether I should speak to the motion first or make the motion.

THE CHAIR: I think maybe what we'll do is have you read your motion, and then I'll call for discussion. I'll allow you to be the first to discuss.

BEN JESSOME: Whereas the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs considers matters relating to veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Legion; and

Whereas matters pertaining to the Canadian Armed Forces predominantly fall under the jurisdiction of the national government; and

Whereas on June 14, 2022, the Minister Responsible for Military Relations and the Nova Scotia Government, the Department of National Defence, the Canadian Armed Forces, and Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services met with provincial and territorial delegates in Ottawa to ratify the Terms of Reference for the Seamless Canada initiative; and

Whereas the objective of Seamless Canada is to strengthen federal, provincial, and territorial collaboration to improve the relocation experience of CAF members by sharing information and best practices among jurisdictions and stakeholders; and

Whereas Seamless Canada has focused on matters pertaining to military families including:

- improved health care access for CAF families;
- securing essential worker status of CAF members;
- a review of education barriers for students relocating between jurisdictions; and
- leveraged employment and training support services for military spouses through the Military Spouse Employment Initiative and the Military Spousal Employment Network;

Therefore, I move that the Nova Scotia Legislature's Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs expands its mandate to include matters related to presently serving military families to support the work of Seamless Canada, as was ratified on June 14, 2022, by the Minister Responsible for Military Relations and the Government of Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: We have a motion on the floor. Do you want to have a discussion about it? We'll open the floor for discussion. MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I appreciate the nature of suggesting an alteration to the mandate of a committee is not something to be taken lightly, so I will begin by saying that. Over the few years that I've had the privilege to sit in the Legislature, we've seen very few adaptations to the committee structure across the board. The Health Committee was instigated a couple of years back, but other than that, the committee structures have largely, to my recollection, remained very consistent and the same.

I would also like to add a disclaimer that the intention behind this motion is not to take away from the nature of business of this committee with respect to a focus on veterans. We in Nova Scotia have this committee of Veterans Affairs, which is unique to Nova Scotia. I think it's an important element to our legislative business to maintain and be proud of, so my rationale focuses on advancing additional issues as they pertain to military families.

We recently received a presentation from Seamless Canada at this committee. I was hopeful at the time to submit it for approval, and was a little bit surprised that it did come through. It doesn't necessarily fall under the auspices of the topic of veterans' issues, because we're talking about presently serving military families.

In having that discussion, I believe many of us were a part of that. It was a very informative and fruitful presentation. In the spirit of accommodating a question that I've heard many times over the last several years - what can we propose to our witnesses who sit at that end of the table? What can we do to help? I believe that adapting the mandate of this committee to incorporate military families is a way that we, as provincial representatives, can help military families who will someday become our veterans.

I've had the privilege to sit on this committee literally for 10 years. When I got called to the Legislature, it was one of the first committees I was appointed to. Every year subsequently, I've participated at this table. I respect the discussions that we have here. I've learned a lot. I know that other members have.

I will say that I believe that many of the organizations that we have seen - and that many of you who perhaps are newer will see - are organizations that have come to the table probably anywhere between four and six times apiece. Not to say that the updates aren't important, but I believe that if we're fulfilling our duties as members, there is an additional and a stronger way to do that by adding to the mandate of this committee specifically around military families.

I'll try not to belabour it any more than that. I respectfully ask the committee's consideration to bring in military families. If the work specific to Seamless Canada is too narrow and the committee feels that we can serve military families more effectively by adjusting this motion, I'm open to that part of the discussion as well. Specifically, I think we have the potential to expand the role of this committee in a very meaningful way.

The terms of reference that were signed on to by the Minister responsible for Military Relations, Minister Lohr, I believe is a signal that the government believes this is an important element to our work as well. Given the comments that we've heard about the challenges that the military faces with respect to retention, and how the challenge of being reposted creates barriers for them, I think that it would be a meaningful opportunity for us to undertake.

THE CHAIR: I think MLA Young had his hand up for the discussion. Do you want to - MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: Is it in order for me to move that we extend the meeting time to, let us say, a possible maximum of 10 more minutes in order to accommodate this motion?

THE CHAIR: You can make that motion, but we have a motion on the floor right now, so we can't entertain another motion. We have to deal with the one on the table, I believe, first before we do that.

MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: I'm just going to speak on the motion. Ensuring that Nova Scotia's military community feels supported and recognized is a priority of this government. We actively engage in a way that works best to address the issues that are important to military members and their families, with the federal government and the Canadian Armed Forces. We're going to continue to raise the issues that affect service members with our federal counterparts to make sure that they are respected and supported.

While this is absolutely a worthy issue, it doesn't make sense for this committee to be meeting on a regular basis about an issue that we don't have any control over. The Seamless Canada agreement was just signed . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for our meeting has come to an end, so we have to leave that there. I have to announce that our next meeting is on December 20th at 2:00 p.m. Our topic for that day will be Veterans and Families: The Importance of Community and Peer Support. The witnesses will be the Department of Community Services, Veteran Farm Project, Halifax & Region Military Family Resource Centre.

With that being said, our meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 4:01 p.m.]