

HANSARD

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COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Tuesday, June 18, 2024

COMMITTEE ROOM

Update on Veteran Trade Programs

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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In Attendance:

Tamer Nusseibeh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Kilian Schlemmer
Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration
Ava Czapalay, Deputy Minister

Helmets to Hardhats
Dave Giannou, Director, Atlantic Region

Mainland Nova Scotia Building and Construction Trades
Brad Smith, Executive Director

Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency
Michelle Bussey, Chief Executive Officer

Nova Scotia Community College
Dr. Jeffrey Taylor, Associate Vice President of Applied Research and Innovation



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JUNE 18, 2024

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.

Good afternoon, everyone. This is the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I'm Chris Palmer, MLA for Kings West and Chair of the committee. Today we will hear from presenters regarding an Update on Veteran Trade Programs. Good to see some familiar faces I've seen at different events before. Welcome.

I'd like to ask all of us in the room to please turn off our phones or put them to silent at this time, if we could. In the case of an emergency, I'd like to ask everybody to use the Granville Street exit and walk up to the Grand Parade. I would like to ask all of our committee members, beginning with Vice Chair Barkhouse, to introduce themselves and their constituencies around the table.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: For the purposes of Hansard, I'd like to note the presence of Legislative Counsel Kilian Schlemmer to my left, and Legislative Committee Clerk Tamer Nusseibeh to my right.

Like I said, our topic today is an Update on Veteran Trade Programs. I'd like to welcome you all here to our meeting today. I know some of you have some opening remarks, but what I'd like to do is ask you all to introduce yourselves first, and then we'll bring it back to you for opening remarks. We'll begin with Mr. Smith for an introduction.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I'd like to invite you all, if you have an opening statement to give to our committee. I think what I'll do is begin with Dr. Taylor on my right, and then we'll move across the table. Just a reminder to all our witnesses to wait for the red light to come on your microphone before you speak.

Dr. Taylor.

DR. JEFFREY TAYLOR: Thank you to the committee for the welcome here this afternoon. It's an honour to be part of this panel of witnesses today. As many of you may know, we just celebrated 21 graduations across the province, 4,000 learners crossing the stage these past two weeks. Taking a breath of relief here this week. I wanted to share a specific story from our Cumberland Campus with you here today, in Springhill. At that ceremony, the valedictorian was a carpentry graduate. His name is Scott MacKay. He got to celebrate his achievements alongside his daughter who graduated with him from the social services program.

This is a really neat story for many reasons, but first and foremost for this committee, Scott came to us after completing a 25-year career as a Canadian Armed Forces veteran. He had a number of occupations, including marine electrician, intelligence operator, and a few others. In that transitioning from military life, Scott really found himself thinking about his next steps. He was able to find this program at his local campus in Springhill. Now that he's got his carpentry diploma secured, he's considering actually coming back to the college to do the two-year business administration diploma. He hopes to one day start his own carpentry and renovation business. We'll be happy to welcome him with open arms and all our entrepreneurial supports if and when that happens.

It's a neat story about the discovery of a second vocation after a proud military career. It's really a great reminder of the ongoing need and the duty we have to ensure that our military personnel are supported following active service.

In November 2022, our president, Mr. Don Bureaux, appeared at this committee. He spoke about how we were just getting started in our efforts to support veterans, as well as active serving members, reservists, family members, all military-connected personnel. We recently signed MOUs with Portage College in Alberta, Loyalist College in Ontario, and other colleges that are a little bit ahead of us in supporting the military community. I actually just spoke with Portage College on the phone yesterday, talking about some of the activity they do at 4 Wing Cold Lake in Alberta.

We're working to strive toward better relationships with our military bases through base commanders, through key staff, military family resource centres, transition groups, et cetera. We participate in a lot of key events that are happening right now with bases and with veterans. We recently hosted a Respect Forum at our campus. Chair, you attended as a supporter of our veterans. I'm really proud to say that my colleagues who attended that from the college are actually continuing to attend Respect Forums around Atlantic Canada. It's really a priority for us to have engagement in that space with veterans.

We are also engaging with Veterans Affairs Canada on educational training benefits. We have done some tricks with our finance department to allow veterans to defer their tuition payments. There were some hiccups around, perhaps, leaving the military starting in September and not having the Veterans Affairs Canada transfer payment until, like, November. At that time, the wolves might be chomping at the door to get your tuition paid. We've made deferrals for all our veterans in that scenario.

A few other simple supports we're offering: We're getting students connected with the Royal Canadian Legion. They offer a free one-year membership for military-connected learners at the college. There are all kinds of other details and programming that I'm sure we'll have a chance to discuss here throughout the course of the committee meeting.

I'll leave you with one quote from Scott's valedictory address from Cumberland Campus. He said, "Age and background do not dictate one's capacity to learn and evolve. It's never too late to embark on a new endeavour and forge new connections. Our journey of learning is infinite." I thought that was a really great quote from that valedictorian.

Thank you again for inviting me here today. I look forward to chatting more.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Bussey, do you have opening remarks? We'll go to Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: Thank you for extending an invitation to the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration for this discussion on transitioning military members into Nova Scotia's skilled trades workforce.

For generations, Nova Scotians have contributed to Canada's defense and security. We are proud of the military personnel who work here and travel around the world to keep us safe and free. They are relatives, neighbours, colleagues, and friends. In their time serving Canada, they have developed many unique skill sets - skills that Nova Scotia needs right now. We need more than 11,000 skilled trades professionals by 2030. To support the infrastructure growth of the province, we need more skills and skilled trade professionals right now.

As many of you are aware, we are accelerating our growth in the skilled trades. Since we were last here, government announced a \$100 million investment in advancing

the skilled trades and modernizing our apprenticeship system. Through this investment, we have outlined actions that will provide supports and incentives, change the way we are offering training, and remove barriers for equity-deserving groups. Our actions will help us recruit and retain more skilled trades professionals.

We will grow Nova Scotia's system by recruiting more employers and journeypersons to train apprentices: our next generation of skilled trades professionals. In fact, in the next three years, we will add up to 5,000 more new apprentices to the system and increase the number of journeypersons training apprentices by 1,000 each year. Our approach is focused on supporting the individual who is considering the skilled trades. It is focused on how we can help them become a skilled trades professional and build their career.

We are interested in working with people to find the best pathway to a skilled trades career in Nova Scotia. Military members are highly skilled and often excellent candidates for the skilled trades when they are ready to transition to civilian careers. In return, skilled trades offers a rewarding and viable career path. It is a chance to serve communities in high-demand careers that pay well.

As a government, we can help military personnel identify opportunities that are right for them in communities where they want to live. We can help them transfer their in-demand skills to our workforce. To support their journey, we're working with partners who understand the unique transition that a military person is making to a civilian career - partners like Helmets to Hardhats, Nova Scotia Community College, the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, and all our industry sector councils, associations, unions, and employers.

Currently, the Apprenticeship Agency recognizes various Red Seal trades with military equivalents. The Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency can assess someone who has partially completed their military trades training and wants to continue learning through a trade apprenticeship, or someone who has completed their military trades training and may be eligible to challenge for certification in a related trade. There are many military trades that transfer to Red Seal trades. For example, someone who works as a construction technician in the military could challenge for the equivalent interprovincial Red Seal trade as a carpenter.

While there are plenty of opportunities, making these transitions can be difficult. We want military personnel to know they are not alone, and we can help guide them through the process. To start, they can reach out to the Apprenticeship Agency to discuss their current trade status. If they are uncertain about the trade they wish to pursue or how to connect to jobs, Nova Scotia Works Employment Services Centres located across the province offer free services and information, both in person and online. Nova Scotia Works centres are also ready to welcome the partners and families of military members who are transferring to the province, both before and after they arrive in Nova Scotia. We have

information available about this online through the Job News & Events section of NovaScotiaWorks.ca. These services can be accessed virtually and through the 50 locations that I mentioned.

Military personnel have already answered the call to serve their country. We want to help them as they transition their careers and find meaningful work in the skilled trades. Thank you very much, and I look forward to today's discussions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Deputy Minister Czapalay.

Mr. Giannou.

DAVE GIANNOU: Thank you, sir. Good afternoon, MLA Palmer, members of the committee, fellow witnesses, members of the audience. I would like to thank you all for taking the time from your busy schedules today to spend some time with us at this meeting.

For those who don't know me, I'm Dave Giannou, Lieutenant-Commander, retired. I had the privilege and honour of serving my country for 36 years in the Royal Canadian Navy. I retired back in 2018.

I'd like to thank this committee for inviting me here today to provide an update on the Helmets to Hardhats program, and our successes in transitioning veterans into rewarding second careers in the unionized construction industry. I also look forward to discussing some of the challenges they meet through their transition. Although the majority of our work is with veterans, we also provide the same services to their partners and their dependents. We work with the national Cadet Program, and we have reached out to the resettled Afghan interpreters who had worked with our troops during the Afghan conflicts.

Our program would not work, though, without the support that we've received from Canada's Building Trades Unions and their employers, the support from our provincial and federal governments, Veterans Affairs Canada, and other organizations whose primary goal is to support our veterans and their families. As a note, most of the organizations that were mentioned here are already organizations that we do connect with. Nova Scotia Works and the Construction Sector Council provide outstanding support to our veterans.

As the director for the Atlantic region, my area of responsibility includes all four Maritime provinces. Therefore, I work closely with the senior leadership of organizations such as the Construction Labour Relations Association and the building trades unions. Mr. Brad Smith, our executive director for the Mainland Nova Scotia Building and Construction Trades Council, has accompanied me here today to offer his knowledge and expertise in support of the trade-related issues that may fall outside of my area of expertise. I work closely with Mr. Smith and his counterparts in the Maritimes to increase opportunities for our members. In Nova Scotia, I also work closely with the Nova Scotia

Construction Sector Council. I've used several of their programs for the veterans to provide pathways into the trades for both deserving veterans and their family members.

[2:15 p.m.]

Having a Helmets to Hardhats representative directly responsible for the Maritimes has increased our success significantly through constant communications and collaboration. We've resulted in a 300 per cent increase in intake over the past three years in Nova Scotia alone. Our collaboration and work with the building trades provides our members access to appropriate training and mentoring required to obtain their journey person or Red Seal status. We'll continue to build on these relationships to support our members transitioning into the next career.

Helmets to Hardhats is a national not-for-profit organization that has been in operation for 12-plus years. We've had almost 10,000 veterans come through our doors looking for support and apply for our program, and we've referred thousands of them into well-paying second careers. They are coming from ages 19 and 20, and up to age 60 - people who are looking to start a second career.

There are 14 building trades that we work with, and there are 60-plus trades within those unions that offer these different opportunities for our veterans. Our staff are primarily veterans, and we've experienced the challenges associated with transition so we can empathize and educate our veterans on what to expect when leaving the Canadian Armed Forces. We provide lived experience to help them recognize their value and how it applies in the civilian sector.

Recently, we had an outreach specialist focus on women and 2SLGBTQIA+ veterans. We now have an Indigenous outreach member who is connecting nationally with our Indigenous veterans and the Indigenous communities to help overcome the barriers that are there getting into the trades.

Our current national executive director - and we just changed over last year - is Mr. Jim Hogarth. He's a 40 years-plus veteran with the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters. He's also the president of the Ontario Building and Construction Trades Council, the Vice President of the Ontario Construction Secretariat, as well as a member of the Board of Directors of the Workplace Safety Insurance Board. His leadership and unique connections are a driving force in the success of this program.

I'm going to give a quick overview of how our program works. Our members register for an account on our website and provide a resumé and proof of military service. We'll reach out and schedule a one-on-one interview to discuss options for their future career. While nine of the 88 trades in our military, once they reach the technician level, can challenge their Red Seal directly, the majority of the people who use our program do not

have trade-related experience that will directly translate into one of the 60-plus trades we represent.

We'll discuss the member's experience, qualifications and intentions, along with the trades they're interested in and where they want to settle. Not everyone wants to retire and stay in the base that they retired from. With this information, we can help them develop a career path, and then work closely with them in the appropriate union local to help them navigate their transition into the trades.

Our conversations with the unions and the employers across Canada on the challenges faced by members released from the Armed Forces without the benefit of EI, tend to help expedite getting our veterans onto a job site so they can continue providing for their families and communities. As our founder is fond of saying, "For what those fine, brave women and men do for us, offering them more options when coming home is just the right thing to do."

I'll end this on a note: Reservists can continue to serve their country and work on a second career in the trades. One reservist I talked to said to me one day, "Dave, as a reservist and a tradesperson, we build what we protect, and we protect what we build."

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

THE CHAIR: Mr. Smith.

BRAD SMITH: Thank you, Chair, and members of the committee for the invitation to join you today. As Mr. Giannou mentioned, I am here to respond to any questions on how the Mainland Nova Scotia Building Trades support the H2H - or Helmets to Hardhats program.

This is personal for me. My dad is a veteran. He served as a pilot on the HMCS *Bonaventure*, which I was christened on. I can tell you from personal experience the challenges for my dad and our family for him to transition from the Canadian Armed Forces into civilian life. This is a passion for me and it's personal for me, and I'm really excited to be able to support the vets.

The Mainland Nova Scotia Building and Construction Trades represents approximately 13,000 skilled trades professionals in the industrial, commercial, and institutional sectors. Our mandate is to recruit, train, and dispatch skilled tradespeople on demand for our over 300 partner unionized contractors. We have seven state-of-the-art training centres with trainers and mentors to support our veterans to successfully transition into the skilled trades. Most of that training is free.

This structure and support, along with a focus on safety, aligns very well with the culture of the military that our vets are accustomed to, and I believe it's a big part of the success of the H2H program. Outcomes count - the veterans benefit from the Building Trades system, with the apprenticeship completion rates over the 80 per cent range and a safety performance 31 per cent better than the unorganized sector. We are proud and honoured to bring our resources and our expertise to support our veterans' transition into a skilled trades career.

THE CHAIR: We'll begin our questioning from our caucuses. Just a reminder to us all that it's 20 minutes for each caucus. We'll begin with the Liberal caucus, and we'll go around to each of the caucuses. We'll end our questioning at 3:45 p.m., then we'll have to attend to some committee business after that.

We'll begin with our Liberal caucus. You're on the clock.

MLA Jessome.

HON. BEN JESSOME: To Deputy Minister Czapalay - and thank you everybody for your comments and the opportunity to ask some questions today - our understanding previously was there were eight trades that were transferrable from military to civilian. Has there been an expansion of that number since we last spoke?

AVA CZAPALAY: I was going to guess nine, and that would be correct. There are nine.

BEN JESSOME: One more, that's great. Is there a continued effort to establish additional trades that are transferrable as well?

AVA CZAPALAY: We're happy to consider anything that comes forward. Everyone needs to remember that individuals coming forward are all assessed on an individual basis.

BEN JESSOME: With respect to some of the investment that government has made with respect to the trades space, the question of apprenticeship and the arrangements around apprenticeship does come up quite frequently. I'm wondering, to any of our guests, primarily directed at Deputy Minister Czapalay: Have there been any adjustments to apprenticeship arrangements for any trades in the recent past that would be worth recognizing as having been accomplished?

AVA CZAPALAY: There's quite a list. I might need help from my CEO here to expand. We're trying to expand the system significantly. That expansion looks like attracting more apprentices into the system, and also retaining more. You'll remember before that I talked about the retention rate being pretty low as it is across Canada - so ensuring that they come into apprenticeship, that they see a career in communities

throughout Nova Scotia, and that they then stay - that they feel welcome in the workplace, feel like they belong, and feel like they have the skills to contribute to the workplace. On the other side, getting more employers to take apprentices - having more journeypersons willing to mentor apprentices and help them go through the system.

The other piece - and this mainly speaks to retention - is removing barriers like: Cost factors such as folks not having the money to buy PPE necessary to do the work; accelerating training for those in the military who have some skills but might not know where they fit in the system, so helping them get through; bursaries at NSCC, for example, to help with the expenses in key trades like carpentry. Summer camps and March Break camps are under way and about to be rolled out. There is a whole variety of things, but the key is really working toward our objective of expanding the system.

BEN JESSOME: Through the Chair, is it possible to provide the committee with a list of those apprenticeship arrangements that you referenced?

AVA CZAPALAY: Yes, we'd be happy to do that.

BEN JESSOME: Excellent. Okay, off to a good start - thank you, everybody. I'm hearing Mr. Giannou reference that folks he serves can be found anywhere from ages 19 to 60 years old. We did have information in the previous session of the Legislature that the MOST program was fairly undersubscribed, if I can use the word. I'm wondering where the MOST program sits in terms of its subscription. This would probably be through Deputy Minister Czapalay. How many folks are taking advantage of that program? I guess one person who uses it is good, but we want to see that fully subscribed, given the government's recognition of the value in it.

THE CHAIR: You had mentioned Mr. Giannou and the deputy minister. We'll go to the deputy minister. It looks like you'd like to respond to that, Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: Yes, if that's okay. The More Opportunities for Skilled Trades program is a tax incentive that includes the skilled trades. It's for people who are aged 30 or younger earning at least \$50,000. The program completed its first cycle this year. It's primarily with the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, but the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency is involved in terms of working through the numbers.

We have heard anecdotally that it's a great program. With the competition across Canada for skilled trades, anything helps, and definitely having a tax incentive is something that is helpful. During our marketing strategy to recruit skilled workers to Nova Scotia, we did hear anecdotally that it was an incentive that attracted people. I'm just checking to see if my CEO found a number for me in the briefing note.

For the taxation year 2023, it's estimated that 4,200 apprentices and 1,780 journeypersons would be eligible for MOST. In terms of who actually claimed in 2023, I

think that's a Department of Finance and Treasury Board question. I see it as a tool in our toolkit for attracting skilled trades workers - no pun intended - but I do feel that anything like that should really be promoted as part of the overall package of opportunities here in Nova Scotia.

BEN JESSOME: I wonder - it may be too granular - if there is a way to identify how many of those people who took advantage of the program come from our Armed Forces?

AVA CZAPALAY: What we'll commit to doing is looking into that. I think we have to check with Department of Finance and Treasury Board.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ince.

HON. TONY INCE: I think my first question is for Deputy Minister Czapalay. I think you had mentioned talking about getting more employers involved in your program. My question to you is regarding the program. You have a host of employers now. Do you have any idea of what range of employers? I know what I'm asking is pretty broad.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Bussey.

MICHELLE BUSSEY: In terms of the range of employers, we have four industry sectors that we actually cover. Construction is one of them, and motive power, industrial manufacturing, and service. When we look at our employers across the board of all those sectors, there are small, medium, rural, urban, unionized, and non-unionized. It's pretty broad in terms of the employers that we're supporting.

TONY INCE: Those individuals who are trained and get the skills, who are transferring from wherever - we have a country that has a lot of competition. My question is: Are there things in place to ensure that those who have had that training, and the skills that they developed stay here, rather than taking off and going to another region in our country?

MICHELLE BUSSEY: We have the Red Seal program, which is a national harmonization of the construction. You're right, the labour mobility is there, but offering all of these incentives, supports and programs, and really working with the apprentices, students, the journeypersons and the employers to understand where their needs are - those are the supports that we've put in place to incentivize them to stay and work all across the province.

TONY INCE: I know it's challenging because I know of a number of people who have left after getting their skilled trades. That is a major concern because we're competing against our neighbours, even in New Brunswick. The more you can really incentivize those folks, thank you, because we need to keep them here. That's it for now.

[2:30 p.m.]

THE CHAIR: MLA Jessome.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Dr. Taylor, does the NSCC collect data on how many of your students are former military? If so, how many does the NSCC serve as of this last academic year?

DR. JEFFREY TAYLOR: Thank you for the question. It's a great question. We're actually going to institute in the coming cycle on our application process a tick box: Are you a military-connected applicant? If so, are you a veteran? We'll have much better data going forward on that.

Previously, we had not been collecting this, so we did a survey in the last year to reach out. Of our approximately 10,000 full-time continuing students, 300 of them indicated they were military connected in some way. Then we did a follow-up survey with those 300, and about 70 indicated they were veterans. It's a fairly small proportion, but I think we'd have some survey loss with that method of capture. We think going forward we'll have a much better handle on this number.

BEN JESSOME: That's excellent news. I know that we've had witnesses in here previously who spoke to the difficulty of getting good data related to military, veterans, things of that nature. It's great to see NSCC taking some leadership and doing so. I think that will be useful in the future.

Deputy Minister Czapalay referenced bursaries that were available. Dr. Taylor, does the NSCC offer - or does the department offer - veteran- or military-specific bursaries to access, perhaps, specific trades?

JEFFREY TAYLOR: We offer all kinds of bursaries and supports. I don't know if I'd be able to list them all for you here today. There are a few typical pathways that we offer. Veterans have access to a number of educational supports upon departure from the military, so one of our priorities is ensuring ease of transition: Don't worry about paying your tuition, we'll work that out with Veterans Canada to ensure that's all covered. In addition to that, though, there are other bursaries that students would be eligible for, especially in the trades and apprenticeship areas.

A third point I'll mention is that in certain areas, we've developed specific "pathways" programming. Pathways to Shipbuilding is one that would probably be familiar to most people where we're specifically recruiting with all the supports and services around it - students who will be able to contribute to this specific initiative. Often, they have a focus on equity-seeking communities. Veterans would certainly be eligible for that, and that would provide a lot of wraparound supports. We're in conversations to consider - I

don't want to compare veterans with equity-deserving communities, but specific wraparound supports in a similar way that veterans would be eligible for as well.

Just an anecdote here. I lived in the U.S. for a long time before coming back home, and in the U.S., they have the GI Bill. If you serve for a certain number of years in the U.S. military, you get free post-secondary education. They just kind of tick a box. In the universities I worked at, you transitioned right through the business office into class. There was no question about tuition or anything - you were a veteran.

I would like us to get to a similar state of that where it's a real ease of transition. We're building the relationships. We're working with Veterans Affairs Canada. We'll get there. There's just some process to get through.

BEN JESSOME: Mr. Giannou, I understand that Helmets to Hardhats put out a release on International Women's Day trying to encourage more women to enter the trades. Would you have some stats or some information on how many women you're working with in that respect?

DAVE GIANNOU: I don't actually have the stats with me on the women that we have working in the trades or have come through our organization. I know the numbers are increasing. Based on our communication plans, we're getting more interest. I'm actually working with a partner of a veteran here in Nova Scotia who is looking to get into one of the trades.

I did actually bring the stats on the releasing numbers of military members. In 2022, there were 6,346 regular force releases and 5,400 reservists. Of that, 984 were women in the regular force, and 971. You're seeing about 20 per cent of the releasees are women releasing from the military. We're not getting 20 per cent through our doors yet, but we're working to increase that. Our last program with outreach to women and 2SLGBTQIA+ veterans was very successful and made a lot of good contacts. It's all about communications and letting them know what programs are out there.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ince.

HON. TONY INCE: My question is to Mr. Giannou also. I know that there are a lot of challenges with a lot of people leaving the military lately. With your Helmets to Hardhats, have you seen an uptake, and what age range if you have?

DAVE GIANNOU: Yes, we have. Our numbers have increased significantly over the last two to three years all across Canada. About three years ago, our referrals into the trades were about 270 veterans and their family members, primarily veterans. This year in the first quarter, we had over 100 members referred into the trades; we're expecting to see over 400. Within less than two years, you're looking at an almost 80 per cent increase in

numbers, but everyone's looking for work right now, and everyone's looking for workers. It helps.

The military - and I'll go back to those stats. Eleven thousand releasing in 2022; you're back down around 9,000 in 2023. In 2024, we'll see how it goes. There was a bump in 2023 of members releasing. We have seen more numbers coming through our doors, and we've had more successes. We had two veterans graduate from the IBEW Local 625 pre-apprenticeship program about a month ago. There were 17 people on that course. Two of them were veterans who came through the Helmets to Hardhats program. They used the Veterans Affairs Canada educational reimbursement money - a 37-week program. Out of the 17 people who graduated on Friday, all 17 of them were on job sites on the following Monday. It was a very successful program.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Giannou. I neglected to say that right at the 20-minute mark, I will call order. If you're in the middle of a response, don't take offence. I just have to keep the meeting on track.

MLA Ince.

TONY INCE: A very quick question - I just lost my thought. Forget it. (Laughs) Must have been a lie. I forget.

THE CHAIR: There'll be another round of questioning after the first round. We'll move on to the NDP caucus.

MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: I wanted to ask you, Mr. Giannou and Mr. Smith - in your introductory remarks, you were saying what your responsibility is for the Atlantic region. You spoke about different kinds of funding for the program - the provincial funding and other funding. How does the funding model work relative to the province? Is it the same for all four provinces that you're working with?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Giannou first, and then if Mr. Smith would like to chime in after.

DAVE GIANNOU: We are funded primarily by the building trades unions. A lot of it comes out of their collective agreements - a penny an hour for their hours worked. That comes from provinces all across Canada. Not every collective agreement contains these clauses from every union, but we work with 14 different unions. Therefore, the money comes from the unions and the employers. It could be a penny each, it could be a half-penny each. It helps to build our funding.

The government funding that we use is typically targeted programs. I myself am a member of that - the Veteran and Family Well-being Fund. They apply for a grant to

increase presence in the Atlantic provinces, and they received the money to hire myself for five years. Provincial governments do provide targeted funding as well.

We have a program in Ontario supporting safety training for our members so that they're job-site-ready from a safety perspective, not trades perspective. They don't have to leave the military, do some safety training, and then go to the job site because it's on paid time for them. It helps them to transition. We also have some educational upgrading available, as well, through some of this targeted funding.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Smith, did you want to add to that? No. Okay, great.

That's helpful to understand how it works. I want to ask the same question, then, about the targeted funding. With the targeted funding that comes from provincial governments in the area that you're responsible for, is it four 25 per cents or is it prorated? Are there some provinces that are in tough on it and others that are contributing less?

DAVE GIANNOU: Not all provinces are buying into the program yet. We are approaching them. We're a very small organization. When I joined the organization three years ago, there were six people on staff in Canada, so it's hard for us to make the grant applications, know what programs are available out there. We have been going after national grants primarily so that we can benefit all of Canada.

We are working on the provincial governments to find out what monies are available to support our veterans in their transition process, but we also have to have a plan that works. It has to be a valuable transition program. If not - if someone else is already providing it, and a lot of the unions are providing the safety training and the trades training within the province - that is not really a valuable use of our time. I hope that answers your question, sir.

GARY BURRILL: Yes, it does. I don't know if you're familiar with what the contributions of provincial governments are outside of the Atlantic region, but can you characterize in general as we look across Canada? What I'm really wondering is: Is Nova Scotia pulling its weight? Are we in the middle of the pack? Top of the pack? Not quite yet there? Do you have any sense of that?

DAVE GIANNOU: Again, that's a very challenging question. Thank you, sir. The Ontario government - we see about 50 per cent of our veterans come in through Ontario. Up until recently, it was Alberta. We had a lot of people from Alberta. The Alberta government did provide funding, and a lot of the Alberta trades bought in as well. Ontario, right now, is about 50 per cent of our clientele. They have really stepped up. They have provided some outstanding funding for our program. It applies primarily to the Ontario residents; there is spillover into the other areas because we deal with all 10 provinces.

For Nova Scotia, again, I haven't pulled a lot in yet. I haven't had a lot of discussions or looked at the grants that are available, but Nova Scotia has some great programs in place that we use anyway. The sector council, the apprenticeship agency will stand up. Why would I duplicate the effort if it's already there?

One point I will mention: For intake, it was Alberta, Ontario, and then the rest of the provinces. Recently, it turned around: Ontario, Alberta, and third in line right now is Nova Scotia, so yes, if you are offering money, sir, I will definitely come over to see you. (Laughter)

GARY BURRILL: Well, then, this is probably a good forum to ask you: What advice or guidance would you have for the Nova Scotia government about ways in which, on the targeted funding end, the government could be helpful in supporting and advancing the program?

DAVE GIANNOU: Sir, I will quickly answer this, but I would like to have Mr. Smith chime in on this as well because he deals a lot with our trades. What areas? For our program's communication, we've recently hired a Director of Communication about a year ago. We're getting ads out; we're getting more information out about our program. As long as people know our doors are open, they will come in and talk to us. I get huge support from the building trades and the employers.

The transition piece is a challenge, but again, I'd like Mr. Smith to chime in, if he wouldn't mind.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Smith.

BRAD SMITH: There are 500,000 workers across the country in the building trades. In Nova Scotia, we have about 17,000 ICI workers, and about 13,000 of them are in the unionized sector. If you think about that penny an hour, you can imagine how many hours are coming across the rest of the country. A lot of the programs we have in Nova Scotia, because of the Sector Council, the Apprenticeship Agency, and a lot of the training that we do to support the veterans is free when they come into the trades, their safety training.

If I were to say where the target is, it's really core funding to make sure we have - pardon the pun - boots on the ground, and why we're having success in Nova Scotia is Mr. Giannou. If the Province would support that, really that's what we need in support, is making sure that we have people like Dave working out there every day. We've got funding for you for another couple of years, I believe. Having that person do that work every day is really the key for us.

GARY BURRILL: Thank you for explaining that. It's good to have that underlined and laid out clearly. That's great. I wanted, Dr. Taylor, to come back to a couple of things

you were saying about comparing our situation to the GI bill and how it works. With the Education and Training Benefit, is there that same kind of seamlessness? How does it differ relative to the community?

[2:45 p.m.]

JEFFREY TAYLOR: There is the Education and Training Benefit. That's attached to an individual. An applicant can be eligible for that under the Veterans Affairs Canada program. They then, as an individual, need to go through the process of applying and obtaining all the documentation and everything. That can be a bit cumbersome, I think, so we would like to provide supports for individuals when they're applying and they have this opportunity.

Working with our finance team on providing a grace period, it is understood this is a veteran. We see their documentation, Veterans Affairs Canada will be providing support, and we just need to be patient. We're working on that. As far as the seamless aspect, I think there's still a bit of opportunity for us to improve.

GARY BURRILL: That's kind of the picture that you painted before. I just wanted to confirm it. In that case, would it not be worth considering for the college to simply say that for retired service members, tuition of the NSCC is free?

JEFFREY TAYLOR: I would love to make tuition free for everyone. Of course, that's not quite a financial option for the college at large. We'd have to talk to many people before we make that decision, but I do love the idea of ensuring that our veterans are supported and aren't being charged out of pocket. Finding a way that we can build the bridge to Veterans Affairs Canada to make this a really smooth - to use your word, seamless - transition is definitely an option we're pursuing.

I mentioned we've been working with a few other colleges across Canada that are a little bit more advanced in this space - Portage College in Alberta, Loyalist College in Ontario - and learning from them and the systems they've set up to do this. I'm optimistic that we'll get there. Currently, the veterans are not paying anything out of pocket themselves. It's more just a question of how our institutional systems dock up with the Veterans Affairs Canada systems.

GARY BURRILL: If I'm understanding right, the absolute numbers of veterans in the college's programs is reasonably small - under 100. A significant percentage of their tuition costs, very significant, is coming through Education and Training Benefit programming. The aggregate cost to the university of a policy that said veterans don't pay tuition here couldn't be very high. Why not from that point of view consider it?

JEFFREY TAYLOR: Are you suggesting that the scalability of this would not present a financial challenge in the future, Mr. Burrill?

GARY BURRILL: I'm just thinking about the basic numbers that you've presented. Your first response about free tuition is a big issue, big cost, big discussion. But this point isn't big issue, big cost, big discussion. It's a pretty finite number for whom it sounds, based on your description, a majority are having a majority of their costs paid. So why wouldn't the way to solve any dissonance or friction for anyone who's waiting for a cheque or having some administrative whatever holding it up - why wouldn't it actually serve the aims that we're talking about this afternoon to say, "At the community college in Nova Scotia, if you're a retired serviceperson, you don't pay tuition"?

JEFFREY TAYLOR: I think we've effectively done that from the experience of the students. They're not paying tuition out of pocket. They're not receiving any hardship. The question is - and I might have to get back to you with more details - about the different insurance providers that are engaged with Veterans Affairs Canada, how the cash flows and how we work that out. But that's our system's stuff to figure out. That's not on the individual learners or the veterans who are trying to get in there.

I want to reassure you that we're not preventing anyone from engaging in education because their tuition bills aren't paid or anything. We recognize that there are some systems issues, and we're working through them.

GARY BURRILL: Deputy Minister Czapalay, I want to ask a kind of parallel question about the MOST program. Those established benefits we've seen from that tax refund - we would wish that to accrue to as many veterans as possible, and yet we know that the age of people coming out of military service retirement is apt to be, on average, significantly over 30. I'm wondering: Has any consideration been given to extending the tax benefits of the MOST program, either under that name or another name, to veterans entering the skilled trades?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: I have to say that the MOST program - how it's defined and the participants in the program - is managed is through the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, so we can endeavour to get that information for you.

GARY BURRILL: Just thinking from a broad policy point of view, if you were trying to think about ways that would provide support and incentives to build up the number of people for whom this seemed like a good path - I wonder if I could ask you or Ms. Bussey - does it seem like an idea that has some things to commend it: a tax incentive parallel to, or maybe the same as, the MOST program for people in the circumstances we're talking about this afternoon?

AVA CZAPALAY: I think any and all suggestions are welcome, in terms of incenting people to participate in the skilled trades. I'll take this back and we'll get a response for you.

GARY BURRILL: I was wondering if Ms. Bussey might want to respond.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Bussey, do you have anything to add?

MICHELLE BUSSEY: Nothing to add, no.

GARY BURRILL: We were talking about this issue a few months ago here at this committee, and one of the things that was talked about was the journey person to apprenticeship ratios and how those are being changed, trying to get more people in the position where they can get their hours in. I wanted to ask you, Ms. Bussey: Are we seeing the improvements that the department had hoped for in this area?

MICHELLE BUSSEY: Absolutely. We are seeing a record number of apprentices coming through and registering into the system - more than we've ever seen. We are attributing that to all of our incentives, programs and supports that we've put in place, including the ratio change.

GARY BURRILL: Those are the things I wanted to ask.

THE CHAIR: MLA Hansen. No? Okay.

We will now move on to our PC caucus for 20 minutes. We'll begin with MLA Craig.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Thank you all for being so engaged here today. One thing that strikes me right off the top is the networking and collaboration between all the entities, and more so, that aren't at the table today, to help our veterans to come out of the military. I was struck, Dr. Taylor, when you indicated that gentleman who came out - and it was alluded to earlier by MLA Burrill - 25 years. A lot of people start their career in the military at 18, so they'd be 43, roughly, and there's so much more to life after age 43. My kids are all older than 43. It's interesting to me the lifelong learning that's required and also embraced, especially by members of our military when they come out of service. That transition is quite the transition.

My father came out of the military. He served on the *Bonnie*. You were christened on the *Bonnie*? You're a little bit younger than I am, but I was there as a teenager on the *Bonnie* and served - not served, but as a dependent, I was sailing on the *Bonnie*. It's very near and dear to my heart too, but Dad, when he retired, he actually taught at NSIT. I know that a number of military people who come out of the military and retire have valuable skills that are transferable and are able to educate others.

I have a couple of questions. I'll start with you, deputy minister, if I might. You talked about the individual who comes out, and the evaluation of the skills and opportunities, and matching those. That leads me to microcredentialing. In,

microcredentialing, you don't have to take the whole course if all you need is one little piece to complete and be able to go forward in a program. I know you indicated about the Red Seal. You had a number of people go directly to Red Seal.

I wonder, deputy minister, if you could comment on microcredentialing as being a possible solution and opportunity for a member who is coming out of service and - through the one-on-one evaluation and that service that's provided - how that would play out here in Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: We're extremely enthusiastic about microcredentialing, and have worked for a couple of years with the community college and the universities - all 10 of them - as well as the sector councils and industry to develop a microcredential framework for Nova Scotia, which ensures that participating employers can access microcredentials of the same quality.

We're creating a microcredential repository where free training can be made available to employers just trying to keep up with modernizing industry and making sure that people have relevant skills and training, and like you say, can stack it on their lifelong training and history of employment.

Apprenticeship is actually one of the original examples of microcredentialing. You're taking skills and building on them, and you're stacking toward a credential, ultimately hoping to get - for many people - a Red Seal. It's a microcredentialing system. That's why I talked about an individualized assessment. It's really key to understand where that individual is in their training and in their journey, and also understanding that many of the veterans coming forward may not have actual training in a trade, but they may have skills that are very applicable to, for example, running a business. There may be things that they can do to fit in.

That's where the one-on-one counselling, advising and testing comes into play - so we know where people fit, and so they don't have to repeat or do anything extra. They can just pick up where they are and tell us where they want to go. Not everyone will want to go do a Red Seal, but where do they want to go in order to complete their training journey?

STEVE CRAIG: That was great to hear. I like the individual being wrapped around - to understand the needs and the wants of the individual. That's something that you're talking about, which is very near and dear to a lot of us, that we do that.

Dr. Taylor, I wonder if I could turn my attention to you with a question or so. Please tell us a little bit about the programs and resources that the college might have that are geared toward helping veterans achieve additional education in the trades, sort of a play on this. Once we've identified that there are these other things that are either needs or wants,

how do you step in? How do you focus around the individual and support the individual in that area?

[3:00 p.m.]

THE CHAIR: Dr. Taylor.

DR. JEFFREY TAYLOR: That's a great question. In addition to the trades programming that was just mentioned here by Deputy Minister Czapalay, we have a number of other programs that would be natural education transitions for veterans to make. One of the individualized considerations that can be a challenge at times, but we're working to address, is the notion of recognition of prior learning. You're coming out of the military with great skills, great training, great experience. How do we map that properly into a program that you may be interested in? Those often become quite individualized and, therefore, manual and take time. We're trying to do some pre-mapping for certain military occupations where if you come out of this occupation with X-number of years of experience, you get credit right into this program. We're trying to do more of that.

I've got a few examples here in front of me. The construction technician trade in the CAF is equivalent to the first year of our carpentry diploma, for example. We've got a few of those, and we're looking to do more and more so the transition's much smoother. I'll also note that's not a unique Nova Scotia challenge; every college in Canada is kind of challenged with this. It's just a part of the educational process.

In terms of additional supports, we're trying very hard to lean into various - almost student culture - activities that will embrace veterans and military-connected learners more. Clubs on campuses, for example, specifically for veterans and military-connected personnel. I mentioned the program with the Legion. Students get a free membership benefit for a year at the Legion. Wreath-laying ceremonies: I know that's almost a no-brainer. Of course, you're going to observe Remembrance Day. Doing it in a coordinated way where our campuses have a contingent that lays a wreath at the local cenotaph that welcomes veterans and military is very meaningful. It's very simple, you might say, but quite meaningful culturally for the students on the campus.

In addition, one thing that's been mentioned a few times: Our veterans and military-connected learners don't have, perhaps, the classroom challenges that an 18-year-old student out of high school might have. They're experienced, they're often very disciplined, they're committed. They want to get this education. The supports you need to put around them are very different from the supports you need to put around the 18-year-old high school graduate. That means different sorts of student services. Perhaps they have mental health supports they need, perhaps they have post-traumatic stress or a number of other things. Accommodating them and ensuring that they can still get all their classroom learning done, perhaps assignment extension deadlines, things of that nature - things they're very sensitive to.

Earlier, I made a bit of an analogy with equity-deserving groups. We're very sensitive to putting supports around equity-deserving groups in communities. It's very important. A similar model for veterans that ensures their needs are being met specifically is what we're striving toward now. Sorry, it was a long-winded answer.

STEVE CRAIG: You're among politicians. I don't think anything would be too long-winded. (Laughter)

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the club.

STEVE CRAIG: Welcome to the club.

You touched on something that I wasn't thinking of, and that is when we talk about the members coming into the system, they essentially are middle-aged mature students. I would suggest to you that they add to the fabric of an institution - almost, if I dare say, parental figures in some cases. A trusted figure, those who have life experiences. I think that's a wonderful addition to any learning institution that we might have.

We talk about things like supports for the members who come out and transition, and you talked about, Dr. Taylor, a few people in organizations that you work with. We talk about Helmets to Hardhats and also - you didn't specifically say this, I don't think - transition services in the Canadian Armed Forces. Perhaps you or anybody else on the panel can comment on just how well this whole idea of post-military education is embraced by the transition services of the Canadian Armed Forces and engaging you to help their members?

I also want to recognize that this is part of a journey. The ultimate goal is that they be employed, right? I wonder if you might also touch on the employers that you talk with - the benefits of being a mature individual, experiences. Those are very attractive to a business. You've got stability, you've got a number of benefits that we can go into that we can all talk about - social, economic and what have you. I wonder, Dr. Taylor or anybody else on the panel, if you could comment about your work with the Canadian Armed Forces and their transition services.

JEFFREY TAYLOR: Great questions. We do work closely with the bases in the Armed Forces. They have a number of programs that exist that are tailored toward transition. They have something called SCANS: Second Career Assistance Networks, which are really meant to help aspiring veterans come out. They have education fairs. Greenwood has a Wing Welcome that they do to bring in employers. We really try to be connected to those groups.

I will note - and it's an understandable challenge - right now, the Armed Force is understaffed. I've heard numbers as high as 25 per cent shortage in personnel. I was in Ottawa about six weeks ago. They call it Outlook Days. The Air Force, the Army, and the

Navy all do a day where they talk about the year ahead in industry partnerships and engagement they will need and sort of listening. The head of the Air Force was there, and he said that he just signed a waiver for someone who's 67 years old to stay in the Air Force. They're that - I don't want to say desperate, but they're really looking to retain personnel in every possible scenario.

When we go to them and we say, We have some great exit programs for veterans, they're not as enthusiastic as may be. When we say we have some great entrance programs, some pathway programs into the military, that's great. They're excited about that. The transition out is something that they want to minimize, understandably, but of course, we work with them and it's all very positive.

To your second point about career connections and ensuring that there's strong employment post-transition, you've heard us say this before, I'm sure. At NSCC we're very proud that all of our students, or 99 per cent of our students, have a work-integrated learning experience or work placement. Every student spends time with an employer in industry, in community, whatever it might be, before they graduate. That's really a key part of ensuring that there's attachment to a career post-education.

We ensure that happens as well, of course, with our veterans and military-connected learners. Most employers, certainly in 2024, are very keen to find good workers, and a retired veteran with good training is a top-notch hire for most employers right now. It's not hard to provide that connection.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Smith.

BRAD SMITH: There are a couple things that I'd like to speak to. In Building Trades, when we work with Helmets to Hardhats, we're recruiting and dispatching based on demand, so there's already the connectivity. They're going into that and straight to work. It's important to note that around supports, apprenticeship is a relationship between the master craftsperson and the person learning the trade.

We have directors of training to make sure that they're getting aligned with the right mentorship. Because the construction industry can bump up and down a little bit, we have the ability to move those apprentices and veterans from contractor to contractor seamlessly. We make sure, again, of the importance of that connectivity directly into what's in demand at that job and training specifically for that. Finally, the importance of that relationship between that journey person and that military veteran learning the trade is really where the success of the retention and completion comes from.

THE CHAIR: MLA Craig.

STEVE CRAIG: Chair, if you don't mind, perhaps go to some of my colleagues. I'll certainly be able to chime in again when the time permits.

THE CHAIR: MLA Harrison, with about five and a half minutes.

LARRY HARRISON: Just a couple of questions for Mr. Giannou. Actually, this is a great sector to draw on to shore up the trades, no question about it. Could you expand a little bit on the types of programs and services that are offered here in Nova Scotia for veterans who could benefit from it?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Giannou.

DAVE GIANNOU: Our organization, our primary focus is to make the connection between the veterans, educate the veterans on what's available out there, and make that connection within the trades and within the unions. The trades are providing a lot of the training for us - the safety training, the trades training and the apprenticeship. They are doing analysis of the skills and experience our veterans have moving forward, and they are able to create tailored programs for them

I was talking to a business manager in Victoria this week about one of our sailors who was getting out as an electrician. They have a four-week training program. They put him through this training program so they can determine where he would best fit. One of the challenges we have is that we have strong military backgrounds, strong training for the Navy environment, but not as strong in the construction environment. So if we're putting someone into a construction environment without that background and experience, we could be setting them up for a failure if they're coming in as high-level, fully qualified, without that level of experience. Working with the unions, working with the trades, they do that, and they understand this. They help with the placements into an appropriate level and appropriate position to benefit the members and advance them.

I just want to step back to MLA Craig's comment earlier, of when a member gets out and he's 43 years old. The average age of the veteran we are working with in our program is 33. People are doing 10 to 15 years and deciding it's time to move on. They're happy with what they've done to serve their country, but they're 33 years old. They absolutely have a full career ahead of them.

I hope that answers your question, sir.

LARRY HARRISON: Have you gotten much feedback from the veterans who have been out to work in the trades, or even those who have gone back to CAF contracts?

DAVE GIANNOU: We do. We actually started a program recently of reaching back to our historical members to see how they're doing. We also have testimonials on our websites from these members. Last year, I attended one of the Boilermakers apprenticeship awards dinners, where one of our veterans was honoured as being the top apprentice in the boilermaker trade. They're doing well.

We have one testimonial on our website: a gentleman who retired eight years ago and joined the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry, and has been with the same company for the last eight years under the unionized contract and loving it. He says he works four days a week. I said maybe I should get a job like that. (Laughter) Then I said no. So yes, we do follow up, sir.

LARRY HARRISON: I'll give my colleague here a chance to ask a question.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse, with a minute and 50 seconds.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: That doesn't leave me a lot of time. I will start with Mr. Smith. Can you tell us about the members you represent, and share any opportunities they have seen from a hiring perspective for the military and veterans looking to get into a post-service career in the trades?

BRAD SMITH: In 30 seconds, I believe . . .

THE CHAIR: You have a minute and 18 seconds. (Laughter)

BRAD SMITH: We hire based on demand and what the contractors are looking for. That is our responsibility: to train and dispatch for that. We love the military veterans because they bring, number one, teamwork. It is number one. They're very good at that. They get up in the morning, they show up on time, and they work a full day. They're absolutely ideal candidates for the trades. They might not have journeyman status, but they are actually natural leaders on our construction sites. They come to us with a good safety - maybe not construction orientation, but they come in there with a mindset around safety and watching out for others.

We love them. We work with just about all the diversity and inclusion, and working through and recruiting - the wraparound supports for that. The military vets are, again, another unique group that we recruit from. We're excited to have them. They bring great skill sets. We're there to support them and to get them as quickly as possible to the journeyman status. They're just a gem to work with.

THE CHAIR: We have five seconds to go, so I think we will pass it over for our second round of questioning. Each caucus will get 10 minutes in this next round. We'll begin with our Liberal caucus.

MLA Ince.

HON. TONY INCE: I remember my question now. I guess my question might be a little outside. It's for any one of the presenters. There are individuals who are in the services who may not want to get training in the skilled trades. Are there programs or supports - like I.T. - for those who are going into those same businesses? Some of those

businesses have I.T. people - counsellors or social workers. You know where I'm going with this. Is there something for those individuals in these programs?

[3:15 p.m.]

THE CHAIR: Mr. Giannou.

DAVE GIANNOU: We don't have a program, per se, with the construction industry, but the employers are always looking for people with experience in trades. A lot of our members come out with that experience in different areas - logistics, leadership, project management, planner estimators. We offer the opportunity for the unionized construction employers we work with to post those opportunities directly on our website. In Nova Scotia, we have about 7 per cent of direct hires through that program, so people with past experience already - outside of unionized construction, but it's the unionized construction employers who are hiring them and bringing them in.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Giannou. Dr. Taylor.

JEFFREY TAYLOR: I think your question was: Beyond trades, are there other opportunities? At the college, we have 140 different programs. Trades and transportation is just one of our five schools. We'd be so happy to welcome veterans into any one of our programs, and often we do, whether it's business, project management. The leadership that some of the military officers already come in with really transitions well to some business opportunities. It's really easy for us to welcome them into a whole variety of sectors. I expect I.T. and technology will be a growing one as we move forward.

AVA CZAPALAY: While listening, I was thinking about our Nova Scotia Works offices. Of course, veterans are welcome to visit those offices and discuss where they're at and look at what types of employment might interest them. We offer programming through those offices, as well as through a variety of different ways.

TONY INCE: I just want to say thank you to all of you for all that you're doing for those who have served and done so much for our country. Thank you for being open, and for being sort of visionaries, and looking at some of the solutions we need for our future, especially now. Thank you so much.

THE CHAIR: MLA Jessome.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Smith, this may get into a space beyond military, but just generally speaking, can you provide some comments on some of the things that you're proud of having worked on in the recent past with respect to improving people coming into the trades sector? Just generally speaking, things that you would note for the committee and for the record - things that you're proud of having worked on with government.

BRAD SMITH: Thank you very much for your question. It's a pretty broad question. There are many things we're proud of. We're proud of our success rate around retention and completion, which I think is the number one focus for us. We're proud of some of the innovative programming we're bringing in. Nova Scotia is the pilot for Building It Green, so we're now training our tradespeople on how to build green and we're doing training for each individual trade on that. We've just launched our national Indigenous awareness training in the trades, so we're that.

We're doing some interesting microcredentialing within our trades. I can give you an example of the electrical trade. We've got the only EV charging station trainer in Nova Scotia. He trains on installation and training EV charging stations. We're now training our tradespeople on that.

I think, overall, what we're excited about is that we're on the leading edge of a lot of what's required for the trades training because we're working with those contractors. We're investing a couple hundred thousand dollars, I believe, over the next little while on new technologies, on VR, AR technologies and things like that. We are the experts in trades training because we do it every day. That's what we're going to continue to do: How quickly, efficiently, and effectively we can get new tradespeople out there in the workforce, and do it so that they're working safely and helping us grow the Nova Scotia economy.

BEN JESSOME: I offer Deputy Minister Czapalay a couple of minutes to respond to that same question as well, please.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: First, you'll notice that we are proud of working with partners like Brad Smith and others. We have a great relationship. He's contributed a ton to the sector. He phones me a lot (laughter) - slips me proposals.

Together we're striving to be better. I'm proud of the way that our partners work together to strengthen the apprenticeship system. Mr. Smith and others gave their time to sit on a pre-apprenticeship panel for Minister Balsler. The co-chair was Don Bureaux from NSCC, and myself. The purpose of the panel was to look at ways where we might work together to really remove all barriers so that people saw pathways into apprenticeship. We wanted people to understand that they could do direct entry. They could go to NSCC training. They could go through the military and have their credentials assessed, or through another line of work and have their credentials assessed. They could challenge exams. We looked at why people didn't feel welcome at work and all the circumstances around retention.

We looked at everything and then presented Minister Balsler with a wide array of recommendations. I'm proud to say that we're working with our partners, especially with

NSCC, the Apprenticeship Agency and others, to make sure that those recommendations are addressed.

One of the things that I think is pretty exciting is that we will be coming up with a landing page so that people who are trying to understand how to navigate the system can just go to one place and get information on apprenticeship, information on direct entry, and information on what it's like to work in the trades to make it easier for people to understand what the pathways are.

BEN JESSOME: Back to wearing my Opposition hat. Mr. Smith, is there anything that you would add for the record that is glaring, or things where you're saying, Why aren't we quite there yet? These are things that we've been working on with government, things that we want to see done.

It's important to recognize the work that has been accomplished, but I also want to offer you an opportunity to mention some of the things that you hope will be done to make your world function a little bit better.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Smith, a minute and a half.

BRAD SMITH: The deputy minister highlighted the partnerships and collaborations. There are a number of things that we're working on. We do that persistently and consistently to move the ball forward. They're always very receptive to the ideas. It's things like we're trying to get the building trades unions recognized with the employers so that we can sponsor immigrants directly. I'm working very closely with the Province and Ava on that particular initiative.

I've always got a funnel of things we're working on and improving. What I will say is that the government is very receptive, and working with the minister and deputy minister on these initiatives. We just keep moving it forward. We just keep driving it forward.

THE CHAIR: MLA Jessome, 40 seconds.

BEN JESSOME: Dr. Taylor, from NSCC's perspective, is the Nova Scotia Student Loans program adequate for your students? In 20 seconds. (Laughter)

THE CHAIR: Dr. Taylor.

JEFFREY TAYLOR: Yes, we certainly take advantage of this program. There are, of course, opportunities for improving it. If we think about veterans, perhaps there's a special pathway to be considered that might be able to accommodate veterans in a unique way. Happy to discuss that further.

THE CHAIR: That concludes the Liberal second round of questioning. We will now go back to the NDP caucus for 10 minutes.

MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Smith and Mr. Giannou, I'd like to ask your opinion of the questions that I was asking Dr. Taylor and Ms. Czapalay earlier. In your opinions, would there be real benefits, from the point of view of integrating veterans into the skilled trades, in having a policy in Nova Scotia that simply said that if you are a veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces, you pay no tuition at our community college? Would this be a good thing? Would this be helpful for the aims we're trying to promote here this afternoon?

BRAD SMITH: I really can't speak to the community college side because when they come into the unionized sector and join a union, their training is included. That's the way we do it. The reason we're able to do that is that our contractors contribute a significant amount of money for every hour worked, and they do it through a collective manner. That collective money is used to support trades training. That's the private sector model, so I can't comment on the public sector model.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Giannou, would you like to follow up?

DAVE GIANNOU: Yes, sir. Challenging question, thank you. There are a lot of opportunities out there for veterans, but one thing we have to recognize is: What's the definition of a veteran? Canada is one of the only countries that has a definition, and it's someone who has signed a blank cheque for their country and completed their basic training. Now you're talking about someone who could be a year in the military or someone like me who's served 36-plus years. You'd have to really be careful with what you're doing. The GI Bill, yes, it works because they have a set period of service, if you've completed that. If we looked at something like that for the military, perhaps it would work. It may be actually a recruiting process for the military, as well as for the trades afterwards. It's just something to think about.

GARY BURRILL: I have another question I wanted to ask your opinions on. Parallel to this, we have the More Opportunities for Skilled Trades Program in Nova Scotia directed at younger people in the skilled trades. We have a pretty good idea of what we're trying to incentivize by doing that. So when we're talking about trying to smooth and improve the path for veterans of all ages into the skilled trades, in your opinions, would it be beneficial for us in Nova Scotia to have a tax refund incentive - similar to the one that we have in MOST for younger skilled tradespeople - for people moving from the Canadian Armed Forces into the skilled trades in the province?

DAVE GIANNOU: Absolutely, sir. As I said, the average age of the veteran we're working with is 33. That means we have them on both sides of that line. A lot of them - when I saw the program, "Ages 30 and below," I thought, "What a shame," because when

you're getting out after 15 years in the service, you're making a good salary. Now you're going to start a second trade, you're going to take a significant pay cut. If there was a tax benefit with that, the benefit might incentivize the military member to go into the trades a little bit easier.

How do you regulate that? Once again, it's the time served and the age. I hope that answers your question.

GARY BURRILL: Thank you very much. These are the things we wanted to ask.

THE CHAIR: We will now move to the PC caucus for their last 10 minutes.

MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Mr. Smith, back where we left off, I agree 100 per cent as a military brat - both of us arriving early today. It's still years later - it has been ingrained in us to work hard and look out for each other and for others, I should say. I'm lucky enough to be on this non-partisan committee and Googled you. I didn't know about you before. For all the millions of viewers out there watching us today: Can you tell us a little bit more about your organization - how it's structured, and just give us a little more detail?

BRAD SMITH: As you may have picked up on Google, my background is actually business and economics. I've got a passion for growing this province. I spent most of my career on what I would call the economic demand side, which was working with companies, organizations and developers on how to build the economy. Then, out of the blue, I was approached by a recruiter to join the building trades - I'd never even heard of them.

What I quickly realized when I looked at the building trades is the value that they brought to Nova Scotians. It represents about 6 per cent of the economy. These are 13,000 families depending on these middle-class jobs. What I call the building trades - again, a business background, no union background - I look at them and say, "These are capitalists with a conscience." Why I say that is because we work in very close partnership with our contractors. If our contractors don't win bids - contractors, our workers, don't go to work.

The values really struck me on that - the values on taking care of people, the values on returning home safely. Every year I go to Ottawa and lay a wreath on behalf of Nova Scotians who have lost their lives to industrial disease or died on the job.

My passion for the building trades and the organization and how it's structured - it's 13 trade unions who are out there working in partnership with our contractors, making sure we have the best skilled tradespeople to get the job done right, safely, with high

productivity and quality. Do the first time right. As they say, cheap skilled tradespeople are not skilled. The skill level of the building trades folks is unparalleled.

[3:30 p.m.]

I'm absolutely proud to be working on the economic supply side of the equation, supporting the Nova Scotia economy with supporting these 13,000 families and growing the Nova Scotia economy.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: This one actually is to Dr. Taylor and the DM - the LSI team, whomever would like to answer it.

I'd kind of like to know what the most in-demand courses are. You give very fulsome answers, so I've heard snippets of my answer, but not quite the whole thing. I'd like to know: What are the most in-demand skilled trades in Nova Scotia and how is the NSCC aligning its programs to meet with the demands while supporting veterans?

THE CHAIR: Dr. Taylor.

DR. JEFFREY TAYLOR: I'm not sure I can answer the "most in demand" question. I feel like my colleagues here at the witness table might have a better answer to that.

We have some wait-listed programs perennially. Welding, for example, would be one that's obviously always in high demand. But I wouldn't have the stats in front of me as well as these colleagues might.

We're always trying to work more closely with employers, with industry, with the NSAA, with the other witnesses at the table to try to find ways to meet the needs and demand of industry. We like to say we're hardwired to industry. I think we can always, of course, improve. But the labour shortage that we feel is very much something that we want to address, and the minister's panel, which was mentioned earlier, was meant to try to get at that.

I'd ask for help from my colleagues here.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Bussey.

MICHELLE BUSSEY: We work really closely, obviously, with our partners, our industry and the community college to try to figure this out as well. I would say - and this is a blanket statement - across the province, we are short in almost every single skilled trade. I think it depends on where you are for the severity of it, but the ones that really do rise to the top consistently would be things like carpentry, automotive service tech, welder

- which Dr. Taylor mentioned already. Those are the ones that are really rising to the top, but all trades are in very big demand right now.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I think I've asked all my questions. I would like to thank Mr. Giannou for his service as well, which I was going to state at the beginning, but I'm stating it now.

I will pass it down to MLA Craig. I think he's ready.

THE CHAIR: MLA Craig.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: I'm ready now.

THE CHAIR: You said you'd be back, but we weren't sure. (Laughter)

STEVE CRAIG: I'm still thinking about that decision by the military to offer, perhaps, somebody at age 67 getting back - I can tell you that MLA Harrison and I are both over 67, so darn.

Dr. Taylor, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about a memorandum of understanding that you have with Portage College and Loyalist College, and what it is that we are going to get out of that MOU? What are the benefits of being there and working with them? Have you had any benefits already that have been realized?

THE CHAIR: Dr. Taylor.

DR. JEFFREY TAYLOR: I'll start with just a blanket statement about colleges across Canada. I spent almost 20 years at universities in Canada and in the U.S. Universities are a very competitive space. You're always trying to one-up the person down the hall or at another school or win this proposal, win this grant.

Colleges are very collaborative spaces. It's wonderful to work at colleges. It's very easy for us to get into an MOU-like partnership with any one of these colleges. We mentioned Portage College and Loyalist College. What that enables us to do is it enables us to learn their best practices and the inroads they've made with their military partners in their communities.

Loyalist College is in Belleville, Ontario, sort of near Kingston area - large Army base. I mentioned Portage near Cold Lake. That's kind of the Air Force capital of Canada. They've done some great work looking at how they can map some of those RPL program outcomes for certain military occupations into learning outcomes at their colleges. That's really valuable for us, because it can allow the fast-track of trainers to move from military veteran into the employment space, industry space.

That's one example. Others are just how they built relationships, very organic: How did you develop this, how did you develop that? I had a call yesterday with Portage College. They said that anytime they can, any chance they get, they invite the military brass from the base to just come and hang out on their campus: Let's have a meeting here, let's have coffee, or come to this event, come to that. They're a very small community, of course. It's not Halifax, but a really neat way to ensure that we know each other and can quickly be connected.

I think sometimes in the small, almost military base-focused communities, the base is the main employer. It's the main heart of the community, so everyone is very much aware of each other. CFB Halifax is a huge employer here too. That was one of the opportunities. We said that we need to really lean into this more at the college and create the same sorts of relationships. Just learning tips and tricks from them has been so valuable.

We are considering going out to visit Lac La Biche in northern Alberta. I will invite the committee members to join us if we make that trip. It is mosquito infested at this time of year, I'm told. We might want to schedule appropriately.

STEVE CRAIG: Thank you for that offer. I don't know if your budget can take all of us. I guess I'll conclude and wrap it up and say thank you very much to each and every one of you for the work you do on behalf of the veterans - of members who have served our country, and those continuing to serve and will at some point come out of service. The life of the military, as we all know, is all-consuming. The skill sets and the culture that you have are very much those that can benefit our economy beyond service. To do everything that we can to encourage that, and to do everything that this committee can to encourage you to be the very best that you can, is something well said and ought to be said often.

Chair, I don't have anything else to offer. Again, it's a wonderful thing, this committee, to be able to talk about because it's the only committee like this in any of the legislatures across Canada that focuses on veterans. To come from a community that has served Canada so well and is a big employer, I think we do a good job here. Again, thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: That concludes our question-and-answer period for our committee here. We'd like to give you all an opportunity to give a closing statement. Maybe what we'll do is go the opposite direction this time. We'll begin with Mr. Smith, and we'll go across the table.

Mr. Smith.

BRAD SMITH: One comment I would make is that I think we need to reframe "trades shortage" to "skills gap." There are many members in our community underrepresented in the trades or equity-deserving groups that have double-digit unemployment, and I think our focus needs to be on how we close the skills gap. There are

people out there whom, if we work closely with them, we can help bridge that gap. The veterans are a group that are trying to transition where there's a skills gap. There are equity groups where there's a skills gap.

I know that we've just put 100 people through nine different programs in the last number of months in partnership with the Nova Scotia Construction Sector Council. We've got a 66, almost 70 per cent stick rate for those individuals in the trades. These are people who have been incarcerated or other challenges they were facing, and they're all equity deserving individuals going through those programs. I think focus needs to be on "How do we close skills gaps?" and then "How do we retain those individuals in the trades?" Every person we retain means there are three less we have to recruit.

Thank you for the opportunity today.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Giannou, closing statement?

DAVE GIANNOU: Thank you, everyone, for taking the time today and hearing some of the issues that we're dealing with as veterans transitioning into the trades or into our second career. There are a lot of challenges out there.

One thing that resonated with me today is I hear a lot about military-connected students, and I'm proud to say that Dr. Darryl Cathcart, one of my colleagues from Helmets to Hardhats, has spearheaded this initiative across Canada. He has worked closely with NSCC. I think Loyalist College was one of the first colleges that he worked with. It's recognizing military communities in these educational institutions and recognizing them for what they are, and providing a support structure for them.

The unions do that for our veterans very well. I find it's very similar. The brotherhood and sisterhood I had in the military - the people I joined with 40 years ago and still hang out with from time to time - I consider them family. I see the same structure in the unions. It's a great landing place for our veterans.

Once again, thank you for your time today. If you have any questions, you know where to reach me.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: Thank you very much for the conversation. I always find I learn when I'm here. I appreciated hearing your remarks, Mr. Giannou.

I just want to say, and perhaps underscore what Mr. Smith just said, that there's room in the skilled trades for everyone. We have a massive need here in Nova Scotia. Certainly there's room for veterans, but we need people from all across Nova Scotia. We need more women. I glanced at you, MLA Hansen, to see if you were going to ask a

question about women, but perhaps you already know. There's less than 9 per cent of women in skilled trades, so why is that? There's only about 20 per cent of equity-deserving employees in the skilled trades.

We need to ensure that the skilled trades are more diverse, and that more people see an opportunity and a pathway in the skilled trades for them, and that employers do their utmost to make people feel welcome and safe, and help them want to stay in the skilled trades.

THE CHAIR: Dr. Taylor.

DR. JEFFREY TAYLOR: Again, I just want to offer my thanks on behalf of our president, Don Bureaux, for including the college at this panel discussion this morning. It was a great discussion with the committee.

Just a final commitment - that we'll continue to seek support through partnerships, innovation and funding opportunities to further our ability to support our country's veterans, as well as active serving personnel, reservists, children, spouses and military-connected folks, to further their educational and professional journey. It's a big commitment for us at the college.

If you have any questions, of course, please reach out to me at any time. If any of your constituents have questions, we've set up a new NSCC military website. By all means, please Google that. Send them that way. We have a dedicated email address: military@nsc.ca. Send any questions that way and we'll get right back to you. My colleagues in the room will get right back to you.

Thank you so much.

THE CHAIR: That's wonderful. Again, thank you all for coming today before our committee. It's been a great conversation.

I'll give us a three-minute recess to allow our guests to leave, and then we'll come back just for a small bit of committee business.

[3:43 p.m. The committee recessed.]

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

THE CHAIR: Order. I'll call our committee back to order just to go over a bit of committee business that was in our agenda. The correspondence from Brett MacDougall, vice-president of Operations in the Eastern Zone for the Nova Scotia Health Authority - has spoken to the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care regarding reciprocal assured

access to contract beds for veterans. The department has yet to respond to the committee on this.

Is there any discussion around that correspondence? You would have all received that - it would have come in. Seeing none, okay.

Is there any other business? Seeing no other business, our next meeting will be on September 17th. We'll now begin break for the Summer. Our topic on that September 17th meeting will be Medical Coverage for Veterans. The witnesses will be Medavie Blue Cross and Veterans Affairs Canada.

That being said, this meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 3:47 p.m.]