



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Winnipeg, MB

Day 3

April 15, 2023

EVIDENCE

Witness 4: Devon Sexstone

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Wayne Lenhardt

The next witness is going to be Devon Sextone.

Okay, could you give us your full name, Devon, and then spell it for us, and then I'll make you swear an oath.

Devon Sexstone

It's Devon Sextone, D-E-V-O-N S-E-X-S-T-O-N-E.

Wayne Lenhardt

Do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth during your testimony today?

Devon Sexstone

I do.

Wayne Lenhardt

Okay, to start with a little context, could you tell us what your career and work history has been since about 2005? Just quickly.

Devon Sexstone

So I've been an army reservist for about 16 years; I'm now a veteran. I have operated equipment and trucks, both militarily and in the civilian world.

When COVID hit, I had just become a unit manager managing a freight terminal for an expedited LTL and courier company, one of the largest in Canada. And I lost both that job and I've been kicked out of the military due to the vaccine mandates.

Wayne Lenhardt

Okay. So let's pick up the timeline: March of 2020, then. This is when there was evolving COVID policy happening. You started to have some fears. Then March of 2021, you're off on parental leave for a bit of time. This is why you were working for Purolator. And then in October of 2021, the vaccine mandates came in. What happened, at that point, in your work place?

Devon Sexstone

So March of 2020, three months into being a manager, COVID, as far as I can recall, landed on the shores of Canada. There was constant, ever-evolving policies coming from head office. The executive branch, in my opinion, did not do a good job of allaying people's fears. A lot of people were understandably concerned, but we were told that we were essential services and we were to continue working.

Throughout the next year and a half or so, there was a lot of high stress. Our industry exploded in terms of busyness and it was uncontrollable growth, coupled with mask mandates and constantly changing policies.

When I returned from parental leave after the birth of our fourth child, in October of 2021, I was told that there would be an impending vaccine mandate. I believe the initial date that they had stated was November or December of 2021. They kept pushing it back because there was a lot of pushback. I was told that if I didn't disclose my status—I believe in November of 2021—that I would be disciplined. I actually ended up disclosing it under duress because, at that point, I wanted my children to have presents under the Christmas tree. Because financially, we were still recovering from me being off on parental leave.

At the same time in November of 2021, the armed forces had told me that if I was to refuse the vaccine that I was no longer allowed to train and parade with them. I was made to read through the entire COVID policy from the Chief of Defence staff and discovered that I had missed a date for voluntary release and was told that, basically, I would be forced out—5F released. I told them that I was going to grieve that because I was not aware of it.

So at the same time, I had the stress of losing my civilian job, which provided for us because my wife was at home with our four young children, who were four or five years old and younger at the time, and my part-time job, which we used to help sustain us.

During the time period between October and December of 2021, there was a lot of confusion going on amongst the head of Purolator, the executive staff. There was questions about the legality, both for myself and others. The only responses I got were either no response whatsoever, or I was told that that was a good question, and that was the end of the email.

At one point, one of the individuals responsible for the vaccine mandate at the executive level was asked,

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essentially, what was going to allow them to legally do this. And his response was that the government was going to be helping them out. So I took that to mean that this was not legal and that, basically, it was a political thing.

Fast forward to January of 2022: myself and 1,032 other individuals were placed on unpaid leave and our ROEs [record of employment] were coded, I believe it was code M—which was suspension or temporary dismissal—and as a result, I was ineligible to collect EI benefits, even though I had been paying into them. So at that point, I had lost my military career. I was no longer allowed to parade. That release finally happened in June of 2022.

So basically, the stress from that was absolutely crushing because had my wife been working and not lost her job, that would have been a different story. But when you are the sole breadwinner for your wife and four young children— To be honest, I felt like an abject failure as a man for quite a long time. Yeah.

Wayne Lenhardt

Okay, to quickly summarize: In January of 2022, the mandate came in to disclose your status or tell them that you're not vaxxed. And if you weren't vaccinated, you would be put on unpaid leave, which happened.

Devon Sexstone

Correct.

Wayne Lenhardt

And so, at this point, you are still basically suspended, unpaid leave with Purolator.

Devon Sexstone

That's correct, yeah, from Purolator.

Wayne Lenhardt

But you did get a different job, so you've been driving truck since.

Devon Sexstone

Yep.

If I may, though, delve into some of the impact that I saw happen to some of my employees that I managed. One of our clerical workers, her husband suffered Bell's palsy as a vaccine injury. She was terrified to get the shots as well, but basically, disclosed to me that she felt she had no choice because financially, it would ruin them. Two of my drivers that drove for me told me that after their second dose of the vaccines, they had horrendous headaches every single day that they had never had previous.

After the 1,032 of us were placed on unpaid leave, 215 of us launched a lawsuit. Several of the individuals from that lawsuit lost their apartments. They were in places like Toronto where the rent is extremely high. They were living in their vehicles. The impact of this policy was attempted starvation. To say to someone that you can't work somewhere is one thing. But to say to someone you can't work somewhere and then, basically, pull out any social safety net is a different thing entirely.

Wayne Lenhardt

I think we should note that you have had other vaccines in the past, so it's not as if you are anti-vaccine.

Devon Sexstone

Yes, I deployed to Afghanistan in 2011. I believe I received five or six different inoculations in a very short window. I had no concerns about it at all. I had no adverse reactions whatsoever. I probably have more vaccines than most people sitting in this room. So I'm not an anti-vaxxer.

My reason for suspicion with the vaccine was my mom was a nurse and she told me about a lot of what she knew. The longer things went on, the more it became quite clear to me that it was politically motivated. People that were asking legitimate questions as to the safety and efficacy of the vaccine were told that they were conspiracy theorists. Our own Prime Minister stood on TV and called them misogynists and racists. It was apparent to me that— From my experience in the military, the government will do what it needs to stay in power and to protect its liability. They often don't, unfortunately, do what is right.

There were a lot of veterans that were prescribed Mefloquine, which is an antimalarial drug. And it came out years later that that drug was causing severe psychological effects on those that were prescribed it. And they knew for decades that it was doing that. So I had an underlying suspicion of the government telling me that a drug was safe.

Wayne Lenhardt

In terms of your employment at the moment, are you making similar money to what you made with Purolator before? And could you compare your wages and your benefits now to what you had with Purolator?

Devon Sexstone

I am making similar, but I'm working 12 to 14 hours a day, instead of eight to 10. I had a pension plan with Purolator that was very good. I had a lot of upward mobility.

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I had hoped to move into more of network planning and logistics and load planning across the entire network, or at least the Western Canada portion. Where I am now, I'm very grateful for the job. The employers treat me very well, but I'm making \$10 an hour less than I was working at Purolator. So it was a substantial pay cut.

Wayne Lenhardt

And was there any benefits from the military prior to you being released from the military back in June of 2022?

Devon Sexstone

No. Thankfully, there had been rumour that my pension would be taken away from that. Thankfully, that didn't materialize. I still have my pension.

Wayne Lenhardt

Okay, so you're managing to support your wife and your four children and yourself at the moment.

Devon Sexstone

Correct.

Wayne Lenhardt

I think, at this point, I'll ask the commissioners if they have any questions.

Dr. Massie?

Commissioner Massie

Thank you very much for your testimony. If I am not mistaken, I was reading this morning that Purolator has dropped this vaccine mandate. Are you aware of that?

Devon Sexstone

I've heard rumour of it, but I have not been contacted by HR to inform me that that's changed. So until that happens— Maybe that is the case, but no one's contacted me to inform me.

Commissioner Massie

Would that be something you would consider?

Devon Sexstone

It's hard to say. To go back after what's approaching a year and a half, to a company that violated every aspect of my employment contract and treated people like absolute garbage—it would be a pretty hard sell. I'm not saying it would be a no-go, but I don't know. By their fruit shall you know them, right?

Commissioner Massie

Thank you.

Wayne Lenhardt

Any other questions from the commissioners?

Okay, on behalf of the Citizens Inquiry, thank you for your testimony.

Sorry, one more question.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

I'm sorry, I'm always slow to put my hand up.

I'm just wondering about the safety net the government provides when you lose employment. I'm thinking of government-contracted employees who can collect EI in the non-contracted periods of the year.

How did you feel when you could not collect EI, even though you had contributed to the system, if you will, since 2005? I believe that's the year.

Devon Sexstone

Yes, since I was 16. It might sound a bit extreme, but I would almost liken it to attempted murder. I mean, you've taken away my ability to provide for my family. It's one thing to do that to me as an individual. Part of the struggle was everyone, it seemed, had vaccine mandates. I have my Class One, which is kind of a ticket to a lot of employment. But a lot of companies would not even entertain employing you if you were unvaccinated.

I mean, even then, you go to an interview— And I had a few interviews that I'm sure the reason that they booted me out the door was because when they asked, "Well, what's going on with Purolator?" "Well, I was unvaccinated." It was immediately a black mark.

So yeah, to pay into something and then be denied it— I mean, it was in keeping with everything they did. Everything Purolator did violated the employment contracts and employment rights of their employees. And they were directed to do that by the government, based off their own admissions.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

Thank you.

Wayne Lenhardt

Any other questions?

Thank you, again, for your testimony.

[00:13:58]

Final Review and Approval: Margaret Phillips, August 10, 2023.

The evidence offered in this transcript is a true and faithful record of witness testimony given during the National Citizens Inquiry (NCI) hearings. The transcript was prepared by members of a team of volunteers using an "intelligent verbatim" transcription method.

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