



# Times Have Changed

BY RICHARD MARTIN

I can't help but see president Trump's most recent order to ban transgender individuals from service in the U.S. armed forces as regressive and, characteristically for him, impulsive and needlessly provocative. It undermines public trust in his leadership and judgment, and could very well lead to a chaotic outcome. He didn't help himself by announcing the order on Twitter, while apparently bypassing or ignoring the White House staff, not to mention the Pentagon.

As we say in French: "ordre + contre-ordre = désordre." This kind of waffling can appear amusing in some cases, but it tends to be corrosive of morale and cohesion. The troops get nervous when their commanders start countermanding previous orders, especially if these are long-standing policies. Who knows how things can turn out when you create a second-class, undesirable status in the face of hard-won changes in organizational culture?

Moreover, the reasons president Trump gave are highly suspect. He stated that supporting transgender service men and women created substantial medical costs and was disruptive. I'll get back to the claim that it's disruptive in a moment, but let's look at the cost issue for now.

According to the CBC.ca website (posted 26 July, updated 27 July 2017): "In Canada, 19 Forces' members completed sex reassignment surgery between 2008 and 2015 for a total cost of \$319,000." That averages out to just under \$17,000 per individual. Over the 8-year period, that's a "whopping" \$40,000 per year! Either way, it's not a lot of money in a total defence budget that's averaged \$16-17 billion during

those 8 years. Even if we add in hormone replacement treatments, psychological and psychiatric support, and other medical and human factors, we're still not looking at a major investment.

Assuming these individuals continue to serve in a useful capacity—and I see no reason why they couldn't—then we can say that the Canadian Forces were able to retain 19 people who were trained and ready for operations. What would have been the cost of releasing them and having to recruit and train new soldiers, airmen, or sailors to replace them? Even if the numbers are ridiculously insignificant in the great scheme of things, we can see that there is really no economic or medical reason to refuse to accommodate the individuals who are currently serving and willing to continue doing so.

The CBC.ca article points out that the RAND Corporation last year estimated the total number of U.S. active duty transgender individuals was 2,500, with another 1,500 reservists. This in a military with more than a million people under arms, and a defence budget this year that is the highest it's ever been, just shy of US\$700 billion! Please!

What does the Pentagon spend on paper clips and printer ink? How about anti-depressants and Viagra? I remember hearing bogus arguments in the early 80s about women in the combat arms and combat operations in a support capacity. They aren't strong enough. They're too emotional. How will they go to the toilet (I'm not kidding)?

And my favourite, what if they have their period? Now we're hearing a different set of bogus arguments, but the fundamental rationale is the same. We can't allow transgender individuals to serve in the armed forces because of costs. Well, we already know that won't wash.

As for the question of transgender individuals being disruptive, we have to ask whether continuing to allow them to serve under existing policies and conditions is as disruptive as changing course in the middle of an accommodation campaign that has apparently been reasonably successful. Perhaps there are "normal" service men and women who have a problem with transgender comrades in arms. Well,

so what? Get them to toe the line or to go find other work.

Back in the early 2000s, Lieutenant-General Mike Jeffries,

then commander of Land Force Command, penned an open letter in the *Maple Leaf*. It was addressed to all those who were complaining or otherwise dissatisfied with rapidly evolving personnel policies. These were designed to accommodate increasingly diverse military members and recruits, whether in terms of sexual orientation, gender, or ethnicity. General Jeffries basically said, if you're not willing to adapt, then you should seek employment elsewhere. The train has left the station and the CF was on it. If you want to stay on, great, but if you don't share the same values, which now include individual diversity, however that is defined, then you are free to leave at any time.

“The train has left the station and the CF was on it”

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