



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

ACVA • NUMBER 002 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, February 18, 2016

—
Chair

Mr. Neil Ellis

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

Thursday, February 18, 2016

• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.)): Good morning, everybody. Thanks for coming.

I hope everybody got a chance to read a report that I had J.R. send out. At a high level looking out, we probably have 24 meetings between now and the end of June, including today's meeting. We have to come up with some type of work plan.

We've asked for the minister to come. We'll probably have the minister, or the parliamentary secretary, MP McCrimmon, here for one or two meetings. We're going to need to have budget meetings, which probably would take maybe four meetings. If we drill down, I'm looking at probably plus or minus 18 meetings that are open moving forward—if that's what everybody is thinking or if anybody has it added up—before the end of June. If we take the session to the end, I think it's around the 20th.

Basically, fiscal oversight and budgetary review is one of the core functions of this committee, and that will probably consist of at least four meetings. Even if we were to say five or six meetings, and with the meetings with the minister, I'm guessing that's around 15 meetings.

We did set up the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure last week. Meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays are coming very quickly. If we had a goal.... Or if we could get to a subcommittee meeting before our next meeting, with today's information and email between now and when the subcommittee meets, we could come up with a work plan that we could discuss at our next meeting on Tuesday.

Is that overreaching or is it too far out for us? We have some great staff that maybe could help us on the subcommittee meeting also.

That's one that you also had to figure out, staff. We can meet whenever we want as the subcommittee.

From there, if there's discussion on that and where we want to go, there are some fine reports that we need to catch up on and read if we haven't got to them yet. We tie in with this report that we got yesterday on what the last committee recommended on some of the reports and what is in the minister's letter.

I'll open up the floor now for discussion.

Mr. Bratina.

• (1110)

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): I need to ask, Mr. Chair, whether there are any ethical conflict issues for members of this committee with regard to having members of the family in RCMP or the forces. I don't anticipate there are, but in orientation we were told to ask whenever....

The Chair: I guess I would defer that to you now, whether it be immediate family.... We could go through that, but on pecuniary, as to whether it would be financial, that one might be a stretch, I guess, unless it's without asking you directly....

Mr. Bob Bratina: My son is graduating from the RCMP in March.

The Chair: As the chair, I don't see that personally, but whether that would be the ethics....

Mr. Bob Bratina: I can see it in money issues. We had this at city council, where a councillor had a son who was on the police department and we were voting on the budget. Other than that, I'm hoping that I can function normally without worrying about that.

The Chair: I guess you could express that conflict at whatever point in a meeting when we would be discussing.... That would probably be the recommendation.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Okay.

The Chair: If it's like my son, he would never give me anything anyway. It's all take, right?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Chair, I'm very grateful to be a member of this committee. I look forward to some incredible work to be done and actions taken.

One of the concerns is that committees do wonderful work and then there's a delay. In keeping with that, I do have a notice of motion that I would like to distribute. I have it in French and English. It relates to the business of the committee. I think it's very much in keeping with our aspirations. If I could have that distributed, then perhaps we could proceed.

Thank you for your indulgence.

The Chair: This would be a notice that you're going to bring that motion to the next meeting. Is that correct?

We'll put that on the agenda for the next meeting.

Mr. Clarke.

[Translation]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): This is in the same vein as what Mr. Bratina said. My brother is in the army and I have just left the Canadian armed forces. I do not know if this creates some ethical problem. I think we are reasonable adults and that we are able to set aside family preferences. I don't see a problem, but if there is one, I would like the public servants concerned to let me know.

[English]

The Chair: I would have thought many veterans had sat on this committee. I really don't see it, unless there is one direct item that would pertain to that, and then you could express the conflict on that item.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Mr. Chair, might I suggest in terms of disclosure statements that we can make them to the chair or to the committee? I'm assuming the whips who have decided who will sit on these committees have thoroughly verified this information. As you know, I myself have two sons in the Canadian Forces. Should there be a vote that would impact our capacity, then we would just step out of that vote. We have disclosed it, and I think that's sufficient in terms of the Ethics Commissioner's requirements.

The Chair: I think that's the reason a lot of you are on the committee, because of the experience of your families, and things like that.

Moving forward, do we want to have a discussion on the thoughts of committee members as to where we want to go, perhaps in relation to the document you got yesterday? Is there anything new we can discuss now, and then the subcommittee can meet? I know a couple of us are not on the subcommittee, but that being said, if we took your information today and we mixed it up, we could bring the work plan back for Tuesday, we hope, on our schedule. I think that meeting would probably be in camera to move forward. We could have a frank discussion on what we put forward, vote on the work plan, and then start moving forward.

Ms. Romanado.

• (1115)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Chair, I'm curious to see whether it would be possible for the committee to do outreach. We have quite a few new people here on the committee, and it might be beneficial for the committee to actually go out and speak to veterans across Canada. We have an idea of some issues that were brought back in the previous Parliament. I myself think it would be beneficial for the committee members to actually have that conversation across Canada to see the top-of-mind concerns and to come back to the committee and discuss them so we're starting with a clean slate.

The Chair: I spoke to the clerk earlier about outreach, in the sense of whether the committee as a whole should do outreach and move forward. We can split the committee and travel. I guess that's a discussion we could have for the work plan. Time goes fast, so if we're down to 19 meetings, it would be nice for us to be together on some of the high-level things and so on. Whether we can cover more ground in twos or threes is maybe something we can all think about. If we broke that down so we could travel twice as much ground, then we could report back, whether it was two, three, or four of us. I

throw that out to everybody for their comments on that. Or do we all want to travel in a group?

Mr. Bob Bratina: I received information that the Legion is meeting in Newfoundland June 9 to 12, or something like that. I felt that somebody should be representing the committee. I'm not sure if the entire group needs to go, but my feeling was that it would be good to have this committee represented at that event.

The Chair: I think we all got that letter. Was it 3,000 members or 300?

Do you remember, Mr. Clarke?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Madam Wagantall and I are already scheduled to be there. If anybody else wants to come, that would be fantastic.

The Chair: Is Mr. Kitchen scheduled? I guess we're all going. The date on that was what?

Mr. Bob Bratina: It's June 9 to 12, or something like that.

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): It's Saturday to Tuesday.

The Chair: Okay. Maybe we can ask the clerk to bring some information on that back to the next meeting. It might be great for all of us to attend that. There are going to be a lot of them there.

The other thing in looking at the schedule, the House schedule we looked at this morning, is are we willing to meet when we're not sitting? For the March-April and June-July periods, I don't know what everybody's schedule is. I guess we can't look that far ahead. May is really busy for all of us. We have three weeks of sitting. For June it depends on when we end, and in April and March we have Easter and March break, I believe. That's something to think about, also.

Ms. Mathyssen.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, in regard to outreach, of course it's important, but very often travelling is most time-consuming. Unless it's something very specific and useful, we might be better to ask for briefings from Veterans Affairs Canada. The bureaucrats can come in, and they can provide a great deal of background information that I'm sure members would find very useful.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

I agree with the member. However, I would like to have more than one stakeholder. It's the same with the Legion: it's one stakeholder. They don't represent every veteran. We know that some of our younger veterans are not active members of the Legion. I would propose that we actually open up the scope of consultation, where we're actually engaging people who may not traditionally go through Veterans Affairs.

I'd like to see the full lens.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Kitchen.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: I agree with you. As you say, veterans affairs is one aspect of it. I would love to have them come to talk to us. We need to talk to other people who don't participate with Veterans Affairs Canada, and who have actually... If there's an avenue that we can propose to them, whereby they can maybe feel they can have a way to come talk to us, I would like to hear those other aspects from different avenues.

The Chair: Would it be too much to ask everybody, between now and, say, Sunday to email us a list of groups you propose, or that anybody proposes we meet with? Then we could have that for our subcommittee on Tuesday.

If we have a subcommittee meeting on Monday, I guess we can set the agenda and everything else we can discuss on Tuesday, if that's fine with everybody. Let's say a Sunday deadline, and anybody's welcome to send that.

• (1120)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Do we send that to you?

The Chair: Yes, or you can copy everybody. That's fine.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Perfect.

The Chair: Send it to the clerk. How about it we send it to the clerk? Then the clerk can distribute it.

Does anybody want to dig down into the report that was sent out yesterday, which was prepared for us?

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Chair, I just want to ask a question here about the process we're going to follow. Today we're going to be having a conversation about the good report that was given to us for consideration. Then the subcommittee is going to meet on Monday to discuss a work plan, and then bring that back to the committee on Tuesday to discuss the subcommittee's work plan.

The Chair: Yes. The discussion for us today is in the sense of how these are some things we can look at and put in the work plan. Whether there's anybody who wants to move the whole report and put it in the work plan and move forward...

Before we get a work plan, there really isn't a lot to do.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Right, and I see Ms. Mathysen's motion. I assume we'll be covering that as part of the work plan, in any event.

The Chair: Yes, we'll put that on the agenda.

Mr. Colin Fraser: We'll take that into consideration when the subcommittee meets to discuss the work plan.

The Chair: We could take that into consideration, yes, correct. Then the motion will be voted on. It will go on Tuesday's agenda.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Okay. When there is a work plan, if that's the phraseology we're using, does that actually come before the committee to vote on it, to see if there's agreement?

The Chair: We should have the full committee pass the work plan.

Mr. Colin Fraser: All right. Thank you.

The Chair: I know we're moving quickly. Looking at Tuesday, is it feasible we can have a work plan, the rough notes of a work plan, or have it sketched out? We'll do an in camera meeting on Tuesday, have a frank discussion on the work plan, and hopefully, pass it. Then we can move forward.

If there's any outreach to do, and if we agree to that on Tuesday, we can start outreach and get going.

Mr. Colin Fraser: May I make a suggestion as well? We talked about an email going to the clerk by Sunday for discussion of what groups we might like to meet with as a committee. If anybody from this committee has thoughts on what things they would like to see in the work plan, would it make sense that they submit those things by Sunday?

The Chair: Correct. Yes.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Okay.

The Chair: Or we could do it on Friday.

Mr. Colin Fraser: That's cutting it close.

The Chair: I know. I'm staying here this weekend, so I have Friday open. I think everybody else is going home.

Sunday would be great. It would give us time to get it out Monday, and Tuesday is the meeting.

Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: I just want to know who will be attending the subcommittee meeting on Monday. How do we choose?

The Chair: We picked the subcommittee at the last meeting. It would be the two vice-chairs, me, and the two members, who are Mr. Fraser and Ms. Lockhart.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Okay.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Do we know when that subcommittee is meeting on Monday?

The Chair: After this meeting, the five of us could pick a time for Monday.

Mr. Colin Fraser: That's fine.

The Chair: A notice of meeting will be sent out, but it would be nice to get your schedules so that we can accommodate everybody.

There's another thing I want to bring up. We would have received an email on this a while ago. It's about order in council appointments. I think everybody got this.

I don't know whether anybody wants to discuss it today, or whether there are any questions to be asked on this. Procedurally this has been passed, basically. The committee can look at this and study it. I don't think we're willing to change it. We can just receive it.

Should we put that on the next agenda, because it wasn't on the agenda today, or do we send it out in an email? Everybody would have received it, I think.

• (1125)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: No, we haven't received it.

The Chair: We'll send that out and put this on next week's agenda also. It would have been early February, but it's in a table form now. We can wait for the next meeting on that.

There were a couple of other things the clerk wanted me to discuss. Are there any dietary requirements, which is always important, or any favourite requirements? We're trying to do paperless agendas. I believe an email was sent yesterday on SharePoint, where we can find all of our material.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Sorry, Mr. Chair, but we've checked, and there were no agenda items for this meeting on SharePoint. The notice of appointment was not on SharePoint, so we're a little ill prepared at this point to look at that. If items could be put on SharePoint in a reasonable time to allow us to look at them, it would be most beneficial.

Thank you.

The Chair: The clerk has made note of that.

With regard to the orders in council, we'll have that out for next week's meeting. I believe we'd just have a motion to receive it. We have copies that we can hand out too—so much for paperless.

The other thing is that everybody has a copy of the minister's mandate letter. There are lots of things in there. If there's anything in particular that we want the committee to study, send that out to the subcommittee. We'll discuss that, and then we'll discuss it at the next meeting.

Mr. Clarke.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

If I understand correctly, we have three days to decide on all our priorities for studies until the end of June.

The Chair: In an ideal situation, that would be. We'll have three days to submit; we'll discuss it at the next meeting, and we'll have to pass it. If we need more time, we can bring it into the next meeting.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: For instance, if we meet a certain group and then notice there's a problem we were not aware of, can we say that we're going to add this one to our studies and discussion on the way?

The Chair: The majority of them, yes we can. That's not a problem. We wouldn't be breaking any rules. We could switch on the fly with a motion.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Monday is going to be—

The Chair: We're moving really quickly.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: —a general framework of where we're going, but there can be more clarification in the details.

The Chair: If that's—

Mr. Alupa Clarke: It's very important. Thank you.

The Chair: Ideally, Monday, if we can come up with the framework for the work plan, if we can't get it passed or get the

discussion through, we'll have another meeting. Unless we have a plan, we can't move forward.

Mr. Kitchen.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: We talked about the document that was prepared for us. It's excellent, and thank you very much for doing that for us. Obviously, some of us are very new to this game—

The Chair: I think we only have one veteran here; we're all going to be calling on you for your experience.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Now that we're sitting here and we have what's in front of us, did you want to discuss this document at all, or have some comments and feedback on it?

The Chair: If you want to comment on it today, we could have comments, or we could look at where the work plan's going with it. We have some time today, or we can wait.

The researcher has offered to present the four big pillars.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): That would be great.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Yes, it would be.

The Chair: I'll pass the floor to you.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré (Committee Researcher): It's good to be working for the committee again. I know most of you now.

Depending on which group, which expert, or which stakeholder you will be speaking to, there are some issues that have been coming back over and over since 2006. Many of these issues are recurring. There was a stakeholders group. The Legion was the big representative, plus the ombudsman, plus smaller groups, and they were speaking with the government. That group had highlighted a few key priorities. In this document, I have connected these priorities with the ones that were highlighted in the mandate letter. There are four big themes that I think are still current issues with veterans groups and veterans in general.

The first one is support to families. It has been identified as somewhat of a disappointment. Before the new Veterans Charter came into force in 2006, one of the key pillars of the new Veterans Charter was supposed to be support to families. The results were sort of disappointing. Since the coming into force of the new Veterans Charter, all these, as we say in French, *lacunes*, have been highlighted concerning families and how individual spouses of veterans cannot access services on their own. They have to go through the veteran and they need some sort of permission to access services. If veterans suffer from any sort of mental issues, for example, they will not, sometimes even for themselves, ask for help, so it's very difficult for people from the family, spouses and children, to get the support they need. That was a key issue that was highlighted for many years.

With regard to financial support for families, in comparison with the scheme coming from the Pension Act, the new Veterans Charter is not very advantageous in terms of general amounts that are provided. There was some criticism of that, and this is also an issue that has been going on. Access to rehabilitation services and support services for individuals and families are two big areas.

Transition to civilian life has been an issue since we have had a professional army, let's say. Before that, civilians were going to war and were then going back to their civilian life. Now they are professionals. They want to have a career in the army, so they are not going back home after their service. They want to have a career. If, for reasons of physical or mental disability they have to be released from the forces, it is a big issue for them. It's much more difficult to integrate into civilian life when you've never had the experience of living in civilian life before getting into the army. It creates new challenges that are very different from those of older veterans. The structures in National Defence and in Veterans Affairs have not adapted very rapidly to these changes. A lot of work has been in progress in the last five years. A lot of efforts have been made to make it easier for veterans to transition when they are released.

Those who are releasing voluntarily don't have much of a problem. Compared to the rest of the population, they have an easier time getting jobs. The problem is for those who are disabled and who have to leave the forces for medical reasons. These are the people who have the most difficulty. We have heard a lot about the rate of suicide in the forces. In the forces themselves it's not so much of a problem. It's a problem of course every time there is a suicide, but the problem is much more acute and significant for veterans. If we have to compare, and it's a bit impersonal and inhuman to compare that to the rates for the general population, in the forces, the statistics are comparable to those for the general population. For veterans after they have left, it's 50% higher.

• (1130)

The problem is there is an issue within the forces, but the issue is much more dramatic and severe for veterans. There is a real issue there, and it's difficult because there's no systematic tracking of veterans after they leave the forces.

There's the difficulty that is very hard to handle.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Are you saying that we don't have a list of the key factors that are causing it to be higher after? We don't know?

• (1135)

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: It's very difficult. We don't know.

The biggest hypothesis is that the transition itself—

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Is that what's difficult?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: — is a very high stress factor. When they become veterans, the only real cause that has been identified for suicide later on has been previous long-term depression and exposure to very tragic events.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Perhaps this would be something really good for this committee to delve into, to try to determine what those triggers are so we can at least identify—

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: It is certainly a current issue.

For the other aspects of the transition, the more administrative, the Department of National Defence and the Department of Veterans Affairs, a lot of work has been done by this committee in previous years, in the last couple of years. I know that both departments are working very hard to make sure that their programs are aligned and all that. Ms. Mathysen's motion addresses that. It has been an issue.

There is work going on. The committee might be interested in knowing what efforts have been put in place and what is the status of these initiatives right now. That would be a topic too.

The third aspect is financial support for veterans. There has been this discussion since the implementation of the new Veterans Charter, of course, pensions, lifelong pensions versus disability awards. On rehab, a rehab-based focus instead of financially supporting veterans and letting them find their way.... This has been an ongoing issue. The committee had decided unanimously that going back to the Pension Act or some similar scheme was not an option. It was decided unanimously in the June 2014 report. Experts had been coming to this committee explaining why to have lifelong pensions instead of sort of forcing, in a way, the rehab process... encouraging rehab through other means than simply financial support was the best way of ensuring that many veterans would go back into the workforce. That has been a topic of study in many reports of the committee in the last 10 years.

Apart from that, there are still issues with a few key benefits that were introduced with the new Veterans Charter. The disability award, of course, is not at the level that the Supreme Court has said by similar compensation it should be. We know that in the U.K. the scheme is very similar and the disability award is twice as high. There are issues with the amount of the disability award.

There was an issue with the permanent impairment allowance. This allowance is for those who are very severely injured, permanently injured for life. We are talking about 1,000, or 2,000 veterans in Canada right now. The criteria for getting this permanent impairment allowance, which has three levels, are incredibly complicated. No one really knows what makes you get this benefit. It has created frustration. Nobody knows why they get first level, second level, third level. A supplement has been introduced. The criteria for the supplement are not clearer than for the award. It's very complicated and there has been a lot of frustration. There have been some efforts by the government to open up the criteria to have some flexibility in the allowance, but we don't know as yet if the result has been that more veterans have got it or not. It could be a topic for a study.

The earnings loss benefit is, I think, financially the key issue since the introduction of the new Veterans Charter. If the earnings loss benefit had been fixed from the start, I don't think we would have had that much of a discussion with the disability award, because the earnings loss benefit is based on the insurance scheme of National Defence. It provides 75% of gross income. The 75% of gross income was linked to the insurance program of the forces. They simply provided the same amount, but with insurance programs if you want the premiums to be higher, you can say that instead of 75% you will have 85% or 90%. It's just a decision based on the amount of the premium. By aligning this, it created all sorts of problems. When military personnel are released for medical reasons, after having done what they've had to do and having been injured and having to be released, they are told, "By the way, you are losing 25% of your income. Here's a cheque. We're done." As they perceive it, they are just being let go, and no support has been provided to facilitate the transition.

•(1140)

This earnings loss benefit or the equivalent is provided to all veterans for two years as an insurance program if they are released for medical reasons. After two years if they are permanently and very severely injured, they will get it until they reach the age of 65. After age 65 it's a big cloud.

There have been many recommendations to increase the amount of the earnings loss benefit to 85%, 90%, or 95% based on gross income, net income, or up to a maximum income. All sorts of schemes have been suggested.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: During those first two years, are they still part of the forces or are they already a veteran?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: They are already a veteran. As soon as they are released from the forces, they get SISIP, which is the insurance program from National Defence, for two years. After two years, there is a reassessment if they are permanently impaired.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Okay.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: If they are, they will get the 75% until they reach age 65.

This income doesn't give you access to retirement income. You cannot buy RRSPs based on that 75%, for example. So there's no retirement income that can be accumulated based on this. There is a small benefit that replaces that, but it's not as much.

There are still many issues with the earnings loss benefit that need to be fixed.

So we have support for families, transition to civilian life, financial benefits, and the last one is service delivery.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Canada has embarked on a process of total fundamental reorganization. It started about 10 years ago, but it has been accelerated in the last five or six years. It is completely redefining itself.

St. Anne's Hospital, which was the last hospital that was administered by Veterans Affairs, is being transferred to Quebec, so about 800 employees are leaving Veterans Affairs to go to the province.

The number of employees at Veterans Affairs has been going down for the last five years. The number of older veterans is going down because they are getting older. The focus that has been put on older veterans for many decades is now switching to younger veterans. They don't have the same needs. They don't have the same issues. That has triggered a total reorganization of the department.

There's a long-term plan in the department, so it will be interesting. Hopefully the committee wants to look at that to see where the government is going with this long-term plan.

Those are the four areas.

The Chair: Mr. Kitchen.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Thank you very much. I appreciate it. It's very helpful to get that concisely put together.

I have four questions for you as we go through. You talked about support for families at the beginning. I guess the question I would

have is on defining those families. Are we about talking myself, my wife, and my children, or if I'm an older veteran and my children have moved away, are we talking about children until age 25? Are parents involved when they are trying to access these services? When I say access these services, I'm basically asking if I am able to say I see my daughter struggling, so how can I get her services? Can I speak to that and do that? Can I ask for services for myself if I say I've seen my daughter struggling and I'm having some issues with that? Is that part of what you were discussing with that?

•(1145)

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: The definition was part of a discussion in the committee about who should be included in families. Some had a very wide definition, some a narrow definition. If you look at page 1 of the document in the recommendations, you will see that was the result of the whole discussion: to have rehab services given to spouses or common law partners. Access to psychological counselling was also given to parents and children. It could be wider depending on who is dealing with the veteran the most. Financial support for family members of seriously disabled veterans was restricted to those veterans who were severely injured, as well as primary caregivers. The definition of "primary caregivers" is given in the health care regulations for veterans.

As to the thought process of defining the families, a very good, unanimous effort was made by the committee to arrive at some agreement. Depending on the services offered, the definition of family will be different.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Were those decisions recommended by the committee?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: Yes.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Is that something we would just follow through step-by-step saying that it's already been done, or is it something that was never finished and we need to look at that to make those decisions?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: You can revisit that because at the end of the June 2014 report, the government had said that it would implement all the recommendations, not necessarily in the next six months, but all of them; this was part of that. The government had agreed that these recommendations be implemented. Everything can be revisited all the time, so of course, we can decide.

I'm just giving you the picture of what was done; a lot of background work was done on this.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Thank you.

You talked a little about mental health and suicide. Did they get into things like musculoskeletal health, orthopaedic health, chemical exposures, those sort of things? Were they all part of that same discussion when they talked about health?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: There was a specific report on chemical exposure. There was never a specific report on mental health and suicide. It was studied, but it was not published as a study and there were no recommendations. It fell on the order paper, so there was never a report.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Do we have access to what they did get done?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: Yes.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Oh, you have it.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: We can introduce the evidence.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Would orthopaedic fall into that same category?

My father jumped off a tank every day for 30 years and developed severe back injuries and issues that followed him. Is that sort of thing what we're...?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: That would be physical health. The department does not make any distinction between mental or physical impairment. If you jump from a tank or your hearing aids makes a problem or mental health, the level of disability is what makes them deal with your situation.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Okay, so they're not looking at just one aspect of it; they're looking at total health.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: The committee has looked at everything. But mental health has been an issue in the media; it's been discussed. It was an area where the department needed to modernize itself, so it's been discussed more during the last few years, but no report was tabled.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: On long-term cost factoring, what's the total cost of the whole package, not necessarily what's given individually?

• (1150)

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: The total cost of...?

Mr. Robert Kitchen: What's the total cost of using all three programs that you've talking about?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: The benefit?

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Right.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: No. There is an assessment.

Do you mean if you want to change them?

Mr. Robert Kitchen: No. I'm trying to find out if there's a place where I can get that information.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: Oh, sure. When we discuss the estimates and when the minister comes, I will provide you with a nice table on how much all the benefits should cost.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Okay.

When we're talking 20 years and how much it will cost the government—

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: That's very difficult.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: I realize it's projections, but....

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: You know, in 2002 nobody knew that Canada would be going to Afghanistan for 10 years.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: True. Okay.

Finally, when we talk about releases, to my understanding, and from what I saw on the document, basically the assumption is that they're not veterans until the military releases them. Assuming they've determined there's an issue; they've determined that all the factors are in place for that individual, and if it's a mental health issue, they have support systems set up before that, they do not become released from that program to become a veteran until those are in place. Is that correct?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: This is the new objective; it hasn't been the case. They tried to do as much as they could, but the new approach is to try to do that. They are keeping them in the forces longer than before.

For some it's an issue, because they are kept in the forces when they cannot be very useful. It makes it difficult for them to become re-employed when they leave.

There is a give and take in keeping them a long time in the forces.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Thank you for your indulgence.

The Chair: Touching on that, aren't there some pilot projects on that right now through the military resource centres?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: Yes. They're more than pilot projects at the resource centres. They are trying to make the transition easier. The problem is they cannot force the provinces to provide the services in the areas where the veterans happen to live. All sorts of issues make it a case-by-case approach. You need to have a case-by-case approach.

If you want to have outreach when you're travelling, visiting resource centres would be good.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mrs. Wagantall.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Do we have a good list of what facilities are available in all the provinces to date, and what the potential is?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: For veterans?

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Yes. Or do we just not get involved at that level?

The service comes through the provinces, right?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: Yes.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Is part of the problem that we don't have enough?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: Well, some of the services come through the provinces, but there are many agreements between the federal government and the provinces to provide services to veterans. There are mental health clinics, federally funded clinics, that are hosted in provincial institutions. There are also some other relationships: long-term care, for example. That's something that has been the subject of negotiations between the provinces and the federal government. There are places where you have what they call reserved beds in provincial institutions. In other places, they're called community institutions. The federal government pays for veterans who are going into a provincial institution.

You have all sorts of agreements, but it's federal-provincial negotiation on these things.

The Chair: Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Colin Fraser: This might have been alluded to earlier, but I just want to be clear on it. The three major reports from the 41st Parliament, will those be distributed to the committee?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: We can do that, of course.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Would you please do that? I think it's really important that we understand the work that was done in the 41st Parliament. Obviously, they had in-depth studies and came up with a series of recommendations that your very good summary seemed to highlight. I want to make sure we're not redoing the work, that we're actually focusing on making sure those recommendations are implemented, and that we're highlighting the ones that haven't necessarily come to recommendation yet, such as suicide prevention and mental health, which I think this committee probably should be looking into.

It would be helpful if those could be distributed.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Bratina.

Mr. Bob Bratina: I know there's some data available on veterans. We had a meeting with the ombudsman, and we saw these large numbers. Have there been any particular surveys to find out what the needs of the veterans are? Are those surveys available?

• (1155)

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: Yes. Statistics Canada with Veterans Affairs made a couple of extensive surveys on the needs and well-being of veterans. I prepared a document highlighting these and the main issues. I could distribute that.

Mr. Bob Bratina: It's interesting, because my sister was a career service person. She told me that when she left the forces, the hardest thing in transition was the fact that for the previous 30 years or so, everything was done for her. You could go anywhere in the world and there would be a place for you to go and so on. Then immediately as you went out the door, there was nothing.

I'm not sure whether that kind of information comes through a StatsCan survey. I'm just asking how we can get the broadest sense of the data we need.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: There is a committee report from 2012 and another one from 2014. Really, you have a lot of testimony in there that will highlight that.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Thank you.

The Chair: Between now and the weekend, could you get those reports to us?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: Sure, tomorrow you'll have them.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Further to what my colleague Mr. Bratina was saying, maybe in the outreach we're going to be doing, if that's where we're going with individuals and groups and so on, we could identify any gaps that were not captured by the survey or if the

data is too old, if it's not relevant or if there are other issues. Maybe through a combination of surveys, a combination of outreach efforts, whether with individuals or organized groups, we could fill those gaps so we could get an accurate picture of where we currently are and attempt to take the temperature in a sense.

I don't think we should put aside the great work that's already been done, not at all, but maybe we'll be able to look at it through a fresh lens.

The Chair: Mr. Kitchen.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: At the last committee, there was a unanimous vote was there not, on those recommendations?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: For the June 2014 report, there was a press conference at which all parties really made strong arguments to convince the government to move forward with all these recommendations. The June 2014 report is a very important one. It really summarizes issues that have been raised for the last eight to 10 years. It was an important step.

The Chair: Okay.

Moving forward, everybody should get any information they want for the work plan to the clerk by Sunday at the latest.

Subcommittee members, after the break, we'll get our calendars out and see about the time for Monday and then we'll see everybody back here Tuesday and hopefully get the work plan done and voted on.

Mr. Colin Fraser: This might have been covered earlier, but I'm just wondering when an agenda would be circulated for the Tuesday meeting. How much in advance is that normally done?

The Chair: It should be two days. Official agendas should be out two days in advance, and ones that aren't so official, maybe with permission, 24 hours. It should be as soon as we can. Procedurally, it is 48 hours, but I think moving forward with what we have to do with the work plan, everybody will forgive us and we can get it done on Tuesday, and if not, we'll finish it up on Thursday.

With that, I'll need a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Colin Fraser: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you, everybody.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>