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Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg



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• (1830)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the fourth meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

Pursuant to the motion adopted on February 8, 2022, the committee is meeting to study the desecration of monuments honouring veterans.

[English]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so that you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

Today's meeting is also taking place in a webinar format. Webinars are for public committee meetings and are available only to members, their staff and witnesses. Members enter immediately as active participants. All functionalities for active participants remain the same. Staff will be non-active participants and can therefore only view the meeting in gallery view.

I would like to take the opportunity to remind all participants at this meeting that screenshots or taking photos of your screen are not permitted.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

As a final reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the Chair.

[Translation]

With respect to the list of speakers, the clerk of the committee and I will do our best to maintain the speaking order for all members, whether they're attending the meeting in person or remotely.

I will let you know, as usual, when you have about a minute left and your time is up, so that you can wrap up, please.

I'd now like to welcome our witnesses. They're with us for the duration of the meeting, until 8:30 p.m.

We have with us, from the Department of National Defence, Stephen Harris, chief historian with the directorate of history and heritage; from the Department of Public Works and Government

Services, Stéphan Déry, assistant deputy minister with the real property services branch; and from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Crystal Garrett-Baird, acting assistant deputy minister with strategic policy and commemoration.

We'll move to opening statements from the witnesses. Each group will have five minutes for their presentation, and then we'll move on to questions from members. I know that Stephen Harris, from the Department of National Defence, won't be making any opening remarks.

Without further ado, I would invite Stéphan Déry from the Department of Public Works and Government Services to make his opening remarks.

Mr. Déry, you have exactly five minutes for your presentation.

• (1835)

[English]

Go ahead, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphan Déry (Assistant Deputy Minister, Real Property Services Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good evening, everyone.

I am pleased to appear before this committee for the first time as assistant deputy minister for the real property services branch at Public Services and Procurement Canada, or PSPC, to discuss the important role PSPC plays in protecting and maintaining the National War Memorial, as well as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

PSPC manages one of the largest and most diverse portfolios of real estate in the country and is the Government of Canada's real estate expert.

PSPC provides safe, healthy and productive working environments for over 260,000 federal employees across Canada, including accommodation to parliamentarians and a full range of real property services.

We are also custodian of special purpose and iconic assets, including bridges, dams and monuments such as the National War Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

[English]

This monument is deeply symbolic and important to Canadians, as it recognizes the sacrifices of all Canadian Armed Forces personnel who have served Canada and helped the country become what it is today, including Corporal Nathan Cirillo, who passed away at the site during the tragic event of October 22, 2014.

PSPC shares custodianship of the National War Memorial site with the National Capital Commission, and both organizations take great pride in playing an important role in the maintenance of the site. Over time, PSPC has developed important partnerships with the NCC, the Ottawa Police Service and the parliamentary precinct security operations centre, as well as with key stakeholders such as the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada, to ensure appropriate coordination of security-related matters at or near the site. Ensuring the safety and security of the site is a joint effort, but ultimately the policing of the site is under the jurisdiction of the Ottawa Police Service. All security-related incidents, including any desecrations, are reported to the Ottawa Police Service immediately for their action.

Unfortunately, given the national significance of the National War Memorial, it can be perceived as a strategic target by some groups, including protestors, which has occasionally resulted in damage to the monument and otherwise disrespectful behaviour. Protests such as the occupation of the National War Memorial site from July 2020 to October 2020 by organizations known as “the Canadian revolution” and the ongoing convoy protests require a delicate balance between applying our authority under the Public Works nuisances regulations and the need to balance jurisdiction, legislation, the right to protest and human rights.

Following the occupation of the site in 2020, PSPC acknowledged that similar incidents were likely to become more frequent in the future. As a mitigation measure, PSPC developed a security incident playbook designed to facilitate an effective and coordinated response among stakeholders to similar events impacting monuments, buildings, engineering and/or architectural assets under the custodianship of PSPC. Over the last few weeks, PSPC has used the playbook to guide their actions in an attempt to mitigate risks and damage to monuments and buildings in Ottawa's downtown core.

Notably, PSPC, at the request of the City of Ottawa and the NCC, has installed temporary fencing and barriers around several monuments, including the National War Memorial, the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument and the Monument to Canadian Fallen to ensure their integrity and prevent them from damage and vandalism.

● (1840)

[Translation]

In closing, I want to stress that there is no excuse for the desecration of national monuments. Public Services and Procurement Canada will continue to work with its partners to ensure that these important monuments are safeguarded from damage and otherwise disrespectful behaviour.

I am confident that the lessons learned as part of the government's response to the aforementioned situations at the National

War Memorial will be helpful to guide future decision-making regarding the protection of monuments, and that it will help this committee in its study.

Thank you for inviting me to appear. I am happy to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Déry.

[English]

Now let's go to Ms. Garrett-Baird for her allocution.

Please open your mike. You have five minutes.

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy and Commemoration, Department of Veterans Affairs): Good evening, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

[Translation]

Thank you for inviting me to join you today.

[English]

I would like to begin by acknowledging that the land I speak to you from is the traditional and unceded territory of the Abegweit Mi'kmaq first nation.

I also want to take a moment to recognize that today is National Flag of Canada Day, a day to reflect on what the flag means to each of us. It was Canadian Second World War veteran, George Stanley, who designed our national flag.

[Translation]

Thank you for your concern about Canada's national monuments that honour veterans, such as the National War Memorial, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument, all of which are sacred and symbolic.

[English]

In addition to providing benefits and services to support the well-being of veterans and their families, the department has a mandate to keep alive the memory of the achievements and sacrifices of those who served Canada in times of war, military conflict and peace. We do so by engaging Canadians of all ages in paying tribute to veterans and those who died in service, ensuring that the legacy of their tremendous contributions to peace and freedom are preserved for generations to come.

Veterans Affairs Canada fulfills this core responsibility through two distinct programs. The Canada remembers program ensures that those who served in Canada's military efforts are honoured, and that the memory of their sacrifices and achievements is preserved. This is done through ceremonies, events, honours, awards and telling the stories of brave Canadians who have served.

The funeral and burial program provides financial assistance for the funeral, burial and grave marking expenses of qualified veterans.

[*Translation*]

Our commemoration work requires working closely with partners and stakeholders, including other federal institutions, veterans organizations, non-governmental organizations, municipalities, schools and museums. Our partner organizations share our commitment to honouring those who have served Canada. I'll talk more about this collaboration with respect to memorials in a moment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Just a second, please. Mr. Rogers, go ahead.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'm having a hard time understanding the translation, because the volume is comparable to what the speaker is saying, so it's not very clear at all. Can they adjust the sound there?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

I'm going to ask the clerk to verify with the technicians to see if this can be resolved.

Please wait, Ms. Garrett-Baird. It won't be long.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Cédric Taquet): I'm sorry to interrupt you, Ms. Garrett-Baird, but please make sure that when you speak, you have the floor selected. I think that's why we've got the same volume for English and French.

• (1845)

The Chair: Thank you.

Let's go back to Ms. Garrett-Baird. You have more than two minutes left.

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: Monuments and cenotaphs recognize the commitment and sacrifices of Canadians who have served. They are a public space to remember the selfless duty of Canadians who have bravely put their lives on the line in the defence of peace and freedom. These monuments and cenotaphs also give future generations an opportunity to learn and remember.

The National War Memorial, also called "The Response", was built after the First World War and symbolizes the sacrifices of all Canadians who have served in the cause of peace and freedom. It is the site of Canada's annual national Remembrance Day ceremony, organized by the Royal Canadian Legion. It was also the site where Corporal Nathan Cirillo tragically passed away on October 22, 2014.

Over the years, the highly visible and prolific memorial has been rededicated to include other conflicts and missions. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was added to the memorial in 2000 and

serves as a reminder to all Canadians of the human cost of our country's commitment to peace and freedom. The richly symbolic National Aboriginal Veterans Monument was unveiled in 2001. The sculpture is a tribute to the many indigenous peoples who served for, and defended the freedom of our country over the years. It reflects traditional—

The Clerk: Ms. Garrett-Baird, I'm sorry to interrupt you. The interpreters are asking me if you could just hold your boom mike a little farther from your mouth. It's too close right now.

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: Thank you.

These monuments and several others located in the national capital region are visible records of our identity as a nation. The National Capital Commission plays an important role in protecting these cultural assets, and managing them as part of Canada's legacy.

[*Translation*]

Public Services and Procurement Canada, or PSPC, acts as the custodian and maintains the National War Memorial site, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument.

[*English*]

As a key stakeholder, Veterans Affairs Canada works with the National Capital Commission and PSPC concerning the National War Memorial, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, National Aboriginal Veterans Monument and other commemorative structures. We closely work with other partners, as well, to organize ceremonies and events for commemorative milestones.

I want to take this time to thank PSPC and the National Capital Commission for their work and support on commemoration and over the past number of weeks. These updates have enabled us to keep our stakeholders informed.

We know the situation in recent weeks has been challenging, and our priority is the health and well-being of our veterans.

Thank you for your time today. It has been a pleasure.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we're going to start the round of questions.

[*Translation*]

I would like to ask members to say, when they ask their questions, who it's for because we have officials from three departments: the Department of National Defence, Public Services and Procurement Canada and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Before we go to the first question, I'm going to give the floor to Luc Desilets, who wants to say something.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Yes, Mr. Chair.

Could you tell us how we are going to get ahead of the votes tonight? I think the bells are going to ring at 8:00 p.m. Are we going to wait until 8:30 p.m.?

The Chair: Here's what I wanted to suggest to committee members.

The bells should ring at 8:00 p.m., but we know the vote is at 8:30 p.m. So I was going to ask all members if they wanted to continue the meeting for about 15 minutes and stop around 8:15 p.m. so that we could use our cellphones to vote.

I would like the committee's consent, but I was planning to do that as soon as the bells ring. It could be 8:00 p.m. or 8:05 p.m. The clerk will notify me as soon as the bells ring, and I will seek the consent of all committee members to that effect.

• (1850)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The first questions will be asked by the committee's first vice-chair.

[English]

Monsieur Caputo, the floor is yours for six minutes. Please go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you all for attending. Chief historian and both assistant deputy ministers, like most Canadians, I was very much disturbed by what we have seen. I rose in the House of Commons two Mondays ago to reflect how I felt.

This message is for all three witnesses. I'm going to read out some language, because we're looking at how we should best move forward. The question relates to subsection 430(4.11) of the Criminal Code, which says:

Everyone who commits mischief in relation to property that is a building, structure or part thereof that primarily serves as a monument to honour persons who were killed or died as a consequence of a war, including a war memorial or cenotaph, or an object associated with honouring or remembering those persons that is located in or on the grounds of such a building or structure, or a cemetery is guilty of an indictable offence or an offence punishable on summary conviction...

It then gives the penalties section. The maximum sentence when proceeding by indictment is 10 years.

The question I have to all three witnesses is whether you believe that these provisions are adequate and/or appropriate, given your knowledge in this area.

The Chair: Let's start with Mr. Harris.

Dr. Stephen Harris (Chief Historian, Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence): Mr. Chair, I'm

afraid I'm going to have to say I am a historian and that question is beyond my purview as the representative here as the chief historian.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Déry, you're second.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have to say that as the manager/custodian to the site, I'm not responsible for the law enforcement at the site. We monitor the site 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and we report any incident to law enforcement so that they can take action at any of our sites that we manage.

Therefore, I wouldn't be able to comment on whether the wording in the Criminal Code is strong enough or the actions that could be taken by law enforcement would well serve what's written in the Criminal Code.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Garrett-Baird, I don't know if you'd like to intervene.

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: The mandate of Veterans Affairs Canada is to keep the memory alive of the achievements and sacrifices of all those who served Canadians in times of war, military conflict and peace. We do not have any role in law enforcement or anything of the sort.

We're very focused on providing benefits and services to veterans and their families in the interest of their well-being and, as I noted, to commemorate those sacrifices and achievements.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you all for your answers.

I'm not sure whether anybody will be able to answer this, but I will ask the question.

To all three, are any of you aware of how often the memorials and cenotaphs are targeted by vandalism?

• (1855)

Dr. Stephen Harris: Mr. Chair, I'm not aware of those statistics at all.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Since 2017, in the past five years, we have noticed 17 incidents of desecration or accidents at the site that were reported to the police. Of those 17 incidents since 2017, five happened between January 28 and today.

In total, in the last five years, there have been 17 incidents, from minor incidents to more damage to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Thank you.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Sir, you mentioned that 17 incidents had occurred. Do you know if there were arrests or charges as a result of any of those 17 incidents?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Thank you for the really good question.

As I mentioned earlier, we're the custodian of the site. Our role is to preserve and maintain the site to ensure that it is there when Canadians want to be there. There are approximately one million Canadians who come to the National War Memorial site each year, so we want to make sure the site is in perfect condition when they're there. With the NCC, our partner that does the maintenance at the site, we ensure that it is in perfect condition.

As soon as an incident is seen or noticed, it's reported to the police. From there, I couldn't tell how many arrests there have been. It would be a question for the Ottawa police.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Déry; and thank you, Mr. Caputo.

Now let's go to Mr. Sean Casey. The floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair; and thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

I'm going to start with Ms. Garrett-Baird. From your seat in the commemorations division at the national headquarters, you are surrounded by people who dedicate their professional lives to serving veterans.

Would you be able to comment on their reaction at the national headquarters of Veterans Affairs, among your colleagues and co-workers, to what happened in the two incidents at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier?

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: Over the past number of weeks, we've been working closely with our colleagues, public servants at Procurement Canada and the National Capital Commission, who have kept us up to date on the situation in Ottawa and how that has been evolving.

As a stakeholder, we have been working with them, and we are grateful for that partnership. We have then been able, in turn, to link up with our stakeholders to ensure that they're aware of what's happening.

As a department, our mandate is to ensure that we continue to commemorate and remember those who have served and have fallen, and to honour their sacrifices and achievements. That is and continues to be a priority of the department as a key element of our mandate.

Mr. Sean Casey: Thank you, Ms. Baird.

To the best of my knowledge, we don't have before the committee today any veterans or veterans organizations. The one with the daily contact with veterans and their organizations would be you and your co-workers in Charlottetown.

Have the phones been ringing off the wall? Can you give us some sense of the reaction from your clients to this...?

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: Sure.

It's important to know that there are approximately 600,000 veterans throughout Canada, and around 190,000 of them are clients of Veterans Affairs Canada. Our goal and our role is to ensure that we are providing the benefits and services to meet their needs.

We know that the events over the past number of weeks have been challenging for Canadians, for veterans and for those who are serving. The health and safety and well-being of those veterans is our top priority, so any veteran who is having challenges that may have been compounded by ongoing events is encouraged to contact the VAC assistance line at 1-800-268-7708.

As for our stakeholders, we have been engaged with them. Of course, they have been very concerned about how things are going, but they are grateful for the engagement with our partners at PSPC and the National Capital Commission and for the ongoing dialogue that we have with them. However, like us, these organizations want to ensure that our memorials and monuments continue to be public spaces to recognize, remember and commemorate those who have served.

• (1900)

Mr. Sean Casey: My last question is for you, Ms. Garrett-Baird, and then I'm going to move on.

There was a "slow roll" convoy on Saturday that started in all points of Prince Edward Island and rolled past the cenotaph at Province House. I expect you are aware of it. One of the significant news stories that came from that convoy was the act of a single veteran, Owen Parkhouse. I expect you're familiar with that, Ms. Garrett-Baird.

Would you please share with the committee what happened in front of the cenotaph in Charlottetown on Saturday morning?

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: Yes. Thank you for the question.

As the member referred to, in Charlottetown on Saturday, there was a convoy, as there were in other parts of the country. It started on John Yeo Drive in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, and then continued to move down University Avenue, which turns into Great George Street. At the end of Great George Street is our cenotaph, which is in front of Province House, or our provincial legislature.

What occurred at that convoy was that as vehicles continued to the end of Great George Street and turned, a veteran, Mr. Owen Parkhouse, was at the cenotaph, ensuring that veterans and the importance of those who have served were recognized.

Mr. Sean Casey: Thank you.

Mr. Harris, it's a pleasure to see you again. You always provide such interesting insights before this committee.

I'm going to ask you a broad question, because I hope that you will have some more insights today as the chief historian.

It's often said that if we forget our history, we're bound to repeat our mistakes, or something along those lines. Sir, from where you sit, what can we learn from our history to ensure that what we've seen here in recent weeks won't be repeated?

Can you provide some sort of historical—

The Chair: Please leave 15 seconds for Mr. Harris to give a quick answer, please.

Dr. Stephen Harris: I'm not sure I can say there are lessons learned.

Canadians do remember and do honour. They don't need to be told to do that. The best example was the bridges over Highway 401 after four soldiers were killed in Afghanistan.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

[Translation]

Your time is up.

We'll move on to Luc Desilets, the committee's second vice-chair.

Mr. Desilets, you have six minutes.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Déry, I'd like you to enlighten me as to how the site was desecrated, exactly. I've read newspaper articles about it, but I haven't seen what happened at the site itself.

Can you describe what happened?

Cars were illegally parked, which isn't insignificant, but I would like to hear what you have to say about that.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Thank you for your question.

People used the monuments as public toilets. Others danced on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

I have just been told that the Ottawa police are asking for the public's help in identifying the person who was filmed dancing on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

It is this disrespect that we have witnessed over the past few weeks, since January 28.

• (1905)

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you for that clarification.

Earlier, you referred to 17 incidents of desecration that occurred at monuments.

Is it the three monuments in Ottawa or other monuments outside of Ottawa?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Thank you for your question.

Public Services and Procurement Canada is the custodian of the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument, the National War Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The 17 incidents refer to this group of monuments in Ottawa, which are under video surveillance 24 hours a day by our colleagues in parliamentary operations.

Mr. Luc Desilets: That's a rather unique occupation. Do you think this situation could have been avoided?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Thank you for your question.

This is a very good question, which is extremely difficult to answer.

[*Technical difficulties*] we have never experienced this type of protest. There were other protests around the monument in the past, but on this scale, I think it's the first [*technical difficulties*].

We worked very closely with our colleagues at Veterans Affairs, the RCMP and the Ottawa Police Service to ensure the best possible crowd control. We also had to make sure that these monuments were protected.

I'll give you an example of just how out of the ordinary this is. My team, of which I am very proud, spent a lot of time over the last three weeks putting up concrete barricades in support of the Ottawa Police, the City of Ottawa and the province. Our entire organization was mobilized on weekdays and weekends to put up concrete fences and barriers everywhere to provide security as requested by the City of Ottawa, the Ottawa Police and the Ontario Provincial Police.

Mr. Luc Desilets: When you're talking about barricades, you're talking about the barricades in Ottawa, not around the three sites we're talking about.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: I'm also talking about the three sites [*technical difficulties*] February 4 [*technical difficulties*]. We installed a fence around the First World War Memorial Site and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. These are eight foot high barriers bolted together. At the request of the National Capital Commission, which is responsible for the other two monuments, we installed bolted fences around them as well.

Mr. Luc Desilets: It is therefore unlikely that such events will occur in the next few days, if the occupation of Ottawa [*technical difficulties*].

Mr. Stéphan Déry: On February 12, the barriers that were installed and bolted together around the National War Memorial were [*technical difficulties*]. We were asked to reinstall them by attaching them to the plaza, but [*technical difficulties*] not to reinstall them, because police officers were worried that they could be used as projectiles and raise tensions between protesters and police. Veterans were [*technical difficulties*].

• (1910)

Mr. Luc Desilets: Your answers were very clear. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Desilets.

[English]

Now, let's go to Ms. Rachel Blaney for six minutes, please.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the interpreters. They are doing their best, but we are having the audio of some witnesses cut out once in a while. I just want to recognize their incredible hard work. I hope we can figure out the issue.

I will go to you, Mr. Déry. I want to thank all the witnesses, of course, for their testimony, but I'm really curious to understand a little bit more about the procedure and process to protect the monuments.

You spoke about the temporary fences that went around the tomb for the forgotten soldier or the lost soldier. I do know that at the same time the other monuments weren't given the same treatment.

What is the process? Do all three monuments get the same treatment at the same time or are there certain processes that have to happen to make sure they are taken care of differently? I'm trying to get clarity in that.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Thank you.

This is a really good question, Mr. Chair.

As I was trying to explain to the committee, Public Services and Procurement Canada is the custodian of the National War Memorial, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and other monuments around the national capital region, but we are not the custodian of the aboriginal veterans and Canadian fallen monuments. Those monuments are the responsibility of the NCC.

On February 4, we had the request from the City of Ottawa saying that due to the events happening in the city, they couldn't properly ensure the safety and the security of the National War Memorial and the unknown soldier. That's why they asked us to install a fence around the monuments.

In my knowledge and in my team's knowledge, that hasn't been done since 1939 when the monument was first unveiled. Maybe Mr. Harris will correct me. It was only done around the monument when it was under renovation or restoration.

This is not done as a *fait accompli*. We consulted with all of our colleagues at Veterans Affairs and National Defence and everyone to ensure that they were in agreement with us for installing a fence around a public monument. The next day or the same night, we were asked by the National Capital Commission to install a fence around the other two monuments as well.

There is no precedence with one monument or the other, but a custodian has to take the responsibility. Then there's a lot of communication between those groups. I would say that these fences went up at nearly the same time. If it was a few hours or a day afterwards, it was because of the number of people we could deploy to these different sites.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much. That's very helpful.

I want to clarify for the record that temporary fences have never been put up before this. They were put up only when they were building the monument.

I want to make sure I understood that piece. I'm not sure if Mr. Harris is the right person to ask, but if somebody could clarify that for me, I would appreciate it.

Dr. Stephen Harris: The only instance I know of, apart from the construction and the reconstitution of the monument, is on November 11, when at times there are crowd control fences for the Remembrance Day event. That's simply a crowd control measure for the event. It's not done out of defensiveness, if I can put it that way.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That's very helpful. Thank you so much.

If I can come back to you, Mr. Déry—through you, of course, Mr. Chair. I apologize for that.

You mentioned in your report to us that a security incident playbook was developed to make sure that there was an effective and coordinated response. Could you let the committee know if this playbook was followed in this occupation, and how it was followed? Who is, ultimately, in charge?

My last question is if there is any way for members to see or access a copy of the playbook, or is it kept securely?

● (1915)

Mr. Stéphan Déry: I will definitely be happy to provide the committee with a copy of the playbook. It's not a security incident playbook that was developed only for the War Memorial, but for all of our properties and buildings. How do we deal with manifestation and people coming...? We follow that playbook to the letter and it's helped us a lot.

As an example, for the land around the National War Memorial, before 2020, there were three custodians of the land. The NCC owned a parcel of it, we owned a parcel of it and Parks Canada owned a parcel of it. There was not necessarily the same jurisdiction or rules and regulations that applied to each of the parcels of land. Since then, Public Services and Procurement have the west and east sides of the monument. The lawn and the front are owned by the NCC.

We've made tremendous strides to simplify the management of this property and ensure its safety.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Déry.

Thank you, Ms. Blaney.

Now let's go to Mr. Fraser Tolmie, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

I have a couple of questions. I appreciate our guests being here.

For clarity, there were some numbers that were thrown around. The national cenotaph has been vandalized 17 times. Was the number that I was given correct? I believe Mr. Déry was the one who gave me that.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Yes. I mentioned that since 2017, there have been 17 incidents, from minor—depending on what we see as minor—to more disrespectful incidents at the National War Memorial and on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: There have been 17 since 2017. They are disrespectful incidents. That is how you phrased them. There have been five recently.

There was a question brought up earlier about the desecration. Is someone dancing on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier considered one incident? Is someone else doing something else another incident? Could you clarify that for me?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Yes. One incident is a person dancing on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. That has been reported to the police. There was maybe another incident the next day happening at the site. Following those, five incidents have happened between January 28 and today.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Were there costs associated to damage in those incidents?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: For the five incidents that we're talking about that happened from January 28 to today, there were no costs incurred, other than installing the fencing and all of this. That was not an incident, that was a preventive measure. There were no costs related to the incident, to my knowledge.

There were five, but I can tell you there were no costs incurred with this lack of respect to the monument.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Thank you.

Are you aware of any other cenotaphs or war memorials across this country that have been damaged or vandalized?

• (1920)

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Are you asking from January 28 or 29 to now, or are we talking—

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: No, historically, have there been war memorials or cenotaphs across this country that have been vandalized?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: I'm not aware of the across Canada perspective. I'm aware that the helmet of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was damaged in 2020. It was not necessarily related to the protest that was happening there at the time, but it was damaged at that time in 2020, and it was repaired by us within hours of finding out that it had been damaged.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: That's disappointing to hear.

There's a difficult balance between ensuring that these sacred spaces are available to the public and protecting them from hateful acts.

How do you believe these two priorities should be balanced?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: It's a difficult balance, balancing the right to protest, the Charter of Rights in Canada, and protecting national monuments like these. Honestly, as a custodian of the site, I will rely on the police force to help us to keep that balance. Sometimes there would be a tent. There's a tent right now that's set up on part of the lawn and the police have been advised.

There's a balance to be made there, and I rely on the police force to make that determination.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Déry.

Thank you, Mr. Tolmie.

We'll now go to Mr. Wilson Miao, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Wilson Miao (Richmond Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Déry, for joining us today for this discussion.

It's really sad to see what happened to our monument due to the convoy, but at the same time, you mentioned the temporary fence that was installed to protect that monument. However, it was also taken away by the protesters.

Looking at this experience and learning from it, do you suggest that we implement a new security strategy or set of procedures in the future to avoid things like this happening?

The Chair: Mr. Déry, please.

[*Translation*]

You may answer the question.

[*English*]

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Mr. Chair, that is a really good question.

As the custodian of the site and the person responsible for maintaining the site, restoring or repairing the site when it needs to be repaired and working with the NCC to maintain the lawn around the site, I note that the monument has never been fenced in, other than, as my colleague Mr. Stephen Harris mentioned, for crowd control, with a lower, three-feet tall fence. It's a shame, in our view, to have to fence around a monument to protect it. It's also a public place to allow more than a million people to pay their respects to those who have given their lives to make this country what it is today.

Our objective is to make this site as open as possible for people to come to pay their respects. At the same time, as I said, we're maintaining the site; we're not the people policing the site or enforcing the law. It's a balance that's hard to maintain, and we really rely on the police force to tell us... As with what happened on February 4, we can't ensure the security of the site and close it in. On February 12, when the fence was removed, we were thinking about putting the fence back up. Again, we talked to all of our partners about this and we were told that it could be worse putting a fence up than leaving it off. A decision was made at the time based on the police force's recommendation to leave it off.

It is a balance this committee could look at: access for the public versus fencing the monument in and preventing public access to it.

• (1925)

Mr. Wilson Miao: Thank you, Mr. Déry, for your answer.

I understand that there is open access to these monuments for anyone who would like to visit them. Is there the potential to put something permanent to protect this in the near future?

You mentioned that there are security cameras monitoring the site 24-7. At the same time, there are possibly times when someone intends to vandalize these monuments and has not been penalized or brought to the attention of the police force.

Do you feel the necessity of putting something there permanently or having security there during specific times to protect these monuments?

The Chair: Answer in 10 seconds, please, Mr. Déry, if you can.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: We also have a patrol that goes to the monument twice at night and twice after dinner, at nine o'clock, eleven o'clock, and one o'clock and three o'clock in the morning. We have the patrol of a commissioner who goes around the site to make sure that everything is okay in addition to the camera monitoring 24-7.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Déry.

We will now continue with Mr. Desilets for two and half minutes.

Mr. Desilets, you have the floor.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Harris, we're going to get you to talk for a bit. In your experience as a historian, is this the product of human stupidity, or have we seen acts like this regularly in the past?

[*English*]

Dr. Stephen Harris: I'm afraid I didn't get all of the question. As the interpreter said, the sound cut out after about 10 seconds.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I'll stop the clock and check it with the clerk. I know that, in the room, we have had a little sound problem. Can the clerk tell us whether the situation has been resolved?

The Clerk: We could have a solution to this problem. Would the Committee agree to suspend the meeting for five minutes so that we can try to solve the problem?

The Chair: Yes, absolutely.

In view of the difficulties encountered by interpretation, the meeting is suspended.

• (1930)

The Chair: We will resume the meeting.

Mr. Desilets, you have the floor. I invite you to start again from the beginning, since only a few seconds had elapsed and the witness hadn't understood the question.

You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Luc Desilets: My question was for Mr. Harris.

I would like to know whether, as a historian, Mr. Harris sees these events as isolated acts, produced by the stupidity of a few individuals, or whether such acts against monuments have occurred regularly in the past.

• (1935)

[*English*]

Dr. Stephen Harris: That's actually a tough question to answer. I don't recall monuments having been attacked like this, certainly not this kind of monument, a monument to the fallen. Spread across the country, units erect monuments to their own, and they aren't required to report to us anything that happens to them. I have never heard of anything like this happening elsewhere before. That makes me hope that it's an isolated event, but the one thing I was taught as an historian is that historians don't predict because they don't always agree on the past.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Ha, ha! Well said! I really like your statement.

This situation affects the members of the Committee, that is obvious. Veterans are the reason this committee exists. In your opinion, is it a lack of education on the part of the public that underlies this kind of behaviour?

[*English*]

Dr. Stephen Harris: Was that directed at me, sir?

I'm not sure it's a lack of education, because for Veterans Affairs, I know their programs well. Their outreach programs reach into schools across the country. When it comes to the overseas commemorative events, the major news networks broadcast live. I think a Canadian who was not aware of the service and sacrifice of the past is probably not aware of a lot, if I can put it that way.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you very much, Mr. Harris.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Desilets. You know, two and half minutes goes by fast.

Now, I will ask Ms. Blaney to take the floor for two and half minutes.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Through you, I would like to come back to Mr. Déry.

I have a question. Earlier, you talked about the need to balance jurisdiction, legislation, the right to protest and human rights. You also talked about the Public Works nuisances regulations. I know that subsection 6(1) states, "No person shall occupy, reside, camp or sleep in or upon any public work or use any vehicle for the purpose of occupying a public work or residing, camping, or sleeping thereon."

I guess my question is, where and how do we draw the line—and who draws the line—between the protesters' lack of respect to the veterans and the monuments and the need for protection?

You spoke also about that space for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and there's that grassy part, which I've seen people camp out on before. I just wanted to ask about that as well, about just the jurisdiction of who is in charge of what part, and how you figure out how to address these issues when some people come in—for example, in that protest in 2020—and camp there for an extended amount of time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Déry, go ahead.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: This is a complicated question. It doesn't seem like it, but, Mr. Chair, let me explain.

In 2020, at some point there were two tents on the west side of the monument, behind, and the east side of the monument. The nuisance regulation under the Public Works nuisances regulations could only apply to the west side of the monument, because this ground was owned by PSPC at the time. The east side of the monument was owned by Parks Canada, and the nuisances regulations are only for Public Works grounds, so they wouldn't apply there. There are a lot of people involved—lawyers, legal, law enforcement officers and coordination with all of our colleagues—in measuring the risk of damage to the monument and interventions and what will be the gain from the interventions.

● (1940)

The Chair: Thank you so much. Your time is over.

Now let's go to Ms. Anna Roberts.

Go ahead for for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I have a couple of questions. I am a little confused too, to be honest with you. It sounds as though this house is owned by three different people, and I often wonder who takes care of what and who assigns those duties. It's quite confusing. I think sometimes we should simplify things and give jurisdiction to one area.

My question to you is this. Given the lessons learned during this protest, we can all agree here that the monuments are very important to every Canadian. What our veterans do for us, for our freedoms, is very important, and we value them. Given the lessons we've learned, what measures do you recommend be taken to ensure no further destruction occurs? How can we protect our monuments?

Given the recent situation, you recommended that the monument be secured with cameras. There was also a mention that every two hours, I believe—and maybe I have that wrong—the police rotate and inspect it.

Given the protest and given what we've seen, would it not be beneficial for it to be monitored on a 24-7 basis?

The Chair: Mr. Déry.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Thank you for the question.

Mr. Chair, if you will allow me, I will answer really quickly on the custodianship of the land.

We used to be three custodians before 2020. We are resolving that. We are now owners. Parks Canada is not an owner of ground there anymore. It's owned by PSPC with the NCC. We have resolved some of these difficulties and the ownership of the land so we can make better decisions and faster decisions, consulting with all of our partners.

As I mentioned, four times a night there is a patrol at the monument by a commissionaire.

There is also a closed circuit camera, an upgraded one, which is monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week by our parliamentary operations centre, from where they can react quickly, advising the City of Ottawa that something is happening at the site.

The site is not part of the parliamentary precinct, so it's not policed by the Parliamentary Protective Services. It's policed by the Ottawa Police, so it's under the jurisdiction of the Ottawa Police, but that oversight is done by monitoring cameras that are 24 hours, seven days a week.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you for that.

Through you, Mr. Chair, help me understand this. If the security cameras are on 24 hours and they are being monitored, do we have any idea of the individuals who have destroyed or vandalized the monuments? If we have the security, is it possible to get identification so that they can be brought to justice?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: I believe the question is addressed to me. Mr. Chair, if you will allow me, I will answer.

All that video footage is passed on to the police services for prosecution, so they can find out who has committed the outrageous lack of respect.

I have one in front of me. On January 29 at 5:26 in the morning, two individuals who appeared to be males, wearing black coats, arrived at the southeast area of the monument and they did what they had to do. That was reported to the police with a clear image from camera number 12. That is the kind of monitoring that is done.

I would also like to put into perspective that for the last five years, we are talking about 17 incidents—five of those happening in the last three weeks. Take into consideration that with approximately five million Canadians visiting the site over the last five years, there have been 17 incidents.

I think the committee has to look at that when they make recommendations with respect to how open the site is versus locking the site up and preventing Canadians from accessing the site.

● (1945)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Déry and Ms. Roberts.

[*Translation*]

I will now give the floor to Mr. Samson for the next five minutes.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd also like to thank our three witnesses for giving us extremely important information.

The acts committed on Canada's National War Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier are disgusting. What happened was truly disturbing. A fence was installed afterwards, which reassured us, but protesters took it down. The police watched them do it. I still have a great deal of difficulty understanding and accepting this type of thing.

Good people can be found among the protesters, but others are committing criminal acts and they're not being arrested for it. I find that unacceptable.

The Canadian flag being waved around was not respected when we celebrated its 57th anniversary. I'm thinking of Nathan Cirillo, who was killed on October 22, 2014.

All of this makes me terribly sad and I'd like to know how veterans are feeling about it.

Hello, Ms. Garrett-Baird. It's a pleasure to see you again.

Did your staff get calls from veterans? They called my office to say they were very disappointed by the situation. Did veterans share their feelings with you?

[English]

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: In terms of veterans, we represent or have about 190,000 veterans who are clients out of over 600,000 in the country. Those who engage with Veterans Affairs Canada are seeking support in benefits and services. In terms of those who have contacted us, we're working with them to ensure that they are getting the support they need. Veterans Affairs Canada does offer mental health supports, including the VAC assistance line, access to our operational stress injury clinics, disability benefits and financial benefits for service-related conditions.

We continue to work with any veteran who contacts us to ensure that they're getting the support they need, while acknowledging that we know that the incidents as they're unfolding in Ottawa are having an impact on veterans and we are here to support them.

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you. That's very important to them.

Mr. Déry, you talked about a guide for security incidents, which was very helpful to responders during the events. What could be added to that guide, now that we have had such an experience? I am not asking you to give me all the details, but, in general, what strategy could be included in this guide in order to be even better prepared in the future?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

• (1950)

There should be better coordination between all stakeholders. We should learn from such events and see them coming, so that we are better prepared.

There have been various events in the country that we could see coming and preparations were made as a result. Together with our partners, we will have to be even more proactive in monitoring what is likely to happen and prepare accordingly. We have had very good communication with our partners, but in the future there needs to be better planning before an event starts.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I think I have about 10 seconds left.

The Chair: Mr. Samson, I am sorry, but your time is up. You can come back to it later.

We'll now go to Mr. Fraser Tolmie for five minutes. Go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: I'm sorry, I thought it was my colleague, Mr. Caputo, who was going next.

Is that correct?

The Chair: No.

At the beginning I had Ms. Block, and the clerk told me that you were going to take that time.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Are you okay with that, Frank?

Mr. Frank Caputo: It's up to you, Fraser. Have you gone already?

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: I have already gone so I'll let you go, Frank, and then I can go later.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, I'll take this round.

I believe this question would be for Mr. Déry, but if I'm not directing it to the right spot, please forgive me.

In terms of the incidents, and we've heard about 17 minor to major ones, I'm trying to get a sense of what these incidents are. I have an idea of what a minor incident would be.

Can you describe the types of incidents we're seeing in these 17 instances?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Mr. Chair, I don't have information here on all of the incidents that have happened over the last five years, but what I can say as an example is those two persons who were seen at night, at five o'clock in the morning, were using the monument as a public washroom. To my knowledge, in the last five years there's been minor graffiti put on some portions of the monument. It's a total lack of respect. Although it doesn't cause financial repercussions for us to repair the monument, it's a total lack of respect to the National War Memorial.

These are the kinds of incidents. It's hard for me to say some of them are bigger than others, because I think they're all incidents of a total lack of respect. They are very disrespectful to this monument.

To my knowledge, there was one incident where we had to repair the helmet on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Thank you.

I understand exactly what you mean when it comes to respect. There aren't really degrees of disrespect; something is either disrespectful or not. I appreciate that.

When it came to the repair of the helmet was that the most significant damage that you're aware of, sir?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Yes, Chair.

To my knowledge, that's the one we had to act on. There was a little graffiti that we also had to erase, but that would be the most expensive damage that we've seen in these incidents. I'm speaking about this from memory, sir. I could look into providing further accounting on this for the committee, if you wish.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Thank you.

I'm just looking for a general estimate and trying to get a flavour for what you're saying.

Just to be sure I have this correct, about five million people have visited this memorial since 2017, so that's approximately one million people per year for the five million.

Is that correct?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Since there's no gate at the National War Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier we're making estimates based on people visiting Parliament. Approximately one million people a year visit Parliament, and since Canadians pay so much respect to their veterans we assume that you don't come to Ottawa to visit Parliament without paying respect to the veterans who have put forward their lives for this country. We are also assuming people visit the memorial site. That's how we estimated that there were about one million visitors per year.

• (1955)

Mr. Frank Caputo: I think that's accurate.

I know when I brought my family here we visited the indigenous war memorial as well as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, so I can understand why you're making that assumption.

If we look at averages, putting aside the last couple of weeks, we see that we average about two incidents a year. Is that correct? Those may range from somebody, as you said, urinating on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, using it as a public toilet.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Yes, sir.

Chair, it's the desecration and graffiti and things of that nature. It would be 12 over the last five years if we do not include the five that just happened in the last three weeks.

Mr. Frank Caputo: That would certainly skew the average.

I have a question about the barriers, because I saw news coverage about them. I'd love to hear a response from anybody who is in the know more so than I am.

Can anyone describe the barriers that were erected, please? Were they bolted down? How were they there, because I didn't have a chance to visit?

The Chair: Mr. Caputo, someone can answer in about 10 or 15 seconds. That's all.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: These barriers were bolted together and were eight feet tall and each panel was 10 feet in length. They were all bolted together. They were not bolted to the pavement of the monument, but they were bolted together around the monument. Somebody would have had to have had tools to dismantle them.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Déry.

Now let's go to Mr. Rogers for five minutes, please.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our guests this evening as well. It's good to see you.

It saddens me to have this conversation, to see what's happened in the last couple of weeks, to watch the media reports of the things going on around the war memorial and the lack of respect that we've seen.

Ms. Garrett-Baird, what kind of feedback have you, at Veterans Affairs, received from the people most connected to the war memorial, like veterans and legions and veterans across the country as they've seen these unfortunate events unfold in Ottawa? Have any of these people provided suggestions on what they feel are appropriate penalties or ways to increase security for the memorial sites?

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: The safety and health and well-being of our veterans is the priority. As I mentioned during my remarks, we've been providing updates to our veterans organizations and stakeholders, and they're very saddened to see the disrespect that has occurred. These monuments are public spaces. They are spaces to commemorate, to remember. They're also spaces for or youth to engage and learn about the sacrifices and achievements of those who have served and those who are serving. There's certainly a level of concern there.

We've heard, for example, from the Royal Canadian Legion, who have made a very public statement about their concern for the safety and protection of the monument and the sacredness of that monument. All the ones that we have discussed this evening, whether it's the National War Memorial, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument, symbolize something very sacred to Canadians. These represent the sacrifices made by our veterans, who have served and put their lives on the line in the cause of peace and freedom. There is nothing more important than that. That is why we will continue to work with our partners at PSPC and the National Capital Commission to ensure that these monuments continue to be symbols for Canadians to recognize and remember.

• (2000)

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you very much.

I think you commented earlier about engaging Canadians of all ages as you do your work at Veterans Affairs. As a former administrator and school teacher, I know for a fact that veterans were recognized and held in high esteem in schools, particularly in schools I taught in. Memorial Day and Remembrance Day were always celebrated and veterans were actually invited into the school to talk about the importance of their contribution to the country.

Is there something further we can do beyond the kinds of things we've done over the years to elevate the importance of the contributions veterans have made to our country?

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

Right now, as part of our 10-year strategic plan, this is a blueprint for future commemorative programming. One key element of this plan is creative approaches to engage all Canadians including youth, new Canadians and indigenous peoples.

There needs to be a greater investment in the stewardship, presentation and commemorative integrity of Canada's commemorative footprint. It's very clear that we can only keep the achievements and the sacrifices of those who have served alive by ensuring that our youth are aware of their history, the impact on the present and what it means for the future.

Within Veterans Affairs Canada, as part of Veterans' Week, we have an extensive suite of learning resources and programming available. We work very closely with schools across the country to provide learning materials and lesson plans that they can use to share with their students and teach them about commemoration and the sacrifices of those who have served.

We recently finished our Valentines for Vets, which is a wonderful program where our youth develop valentines and share those with veterans in the long-term care facilities. This continues to be a focal point and a key area for commemoration as we move forward.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Ms. Garrett-Baird.

[Translation]

The bells are ringing.

I am speaking to members of the committee. Do I have unanimous consent to continue this meeting until 8:15 p.m., so that we have time to vote? I know there are several members of the committee in the room. Please indicate to the clerk if you disagree. For those of you who are in virtual mode, please indicate on the screen if you disagree.

[English]

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Chair, may I address you, please?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Caputo, please go ahead.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Thank you.

I'm prepared to provide consent to 8:10. Three members have indicated they're voting in person, so I would suggest 8:10.

The Chair: Okay, 8:10.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Chair, I think that Rechie and I, here in the room, are fine with 8:10 as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: There are no objections. We're going to go until 8:10 and the clerk will help make sure that I'm on time.

Right now, let's go to Mr. Desilets.

[Translation]

Mr. Desilets, you have two and half minutes.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was worried I would not have a second round.

This is going to sound a little strange in a committee, but we care very deeply about veterans' monuments. That's essential. It's a connection to our past and to our history, to give a nod to Mr. Harris. I'd like to throw out this little quote that my darling parliamentary assistant just found for me: "Lack of understanding of the present is inevitably the result of ignorance of the past".

Having said that, I would like Mr Déry to make proposals or recommendations to the Committee. That's what committees are for. Do you need money? Do you need the rules changed, the laws amended? Do the processes need to be viewed differently or reviewed?

● (2005)

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Thank you very much, Mr. Desilets.

Here is what I would suggest to the committee. Canada should take note of what is being done elsewhere, for example in the United States or other Commonwealth countries, such as the United Kingdom and Australia. These countries have already faced events that we don't usually experience in Canada. These countries have adopted different approaches, some of which are similar to those used in Canada, but they may be at a different stage. Canada could look to these countries for inspiration on how to improve respect for memorials and ensure a greater presence...

Mr. Luc Desilets: I am sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Déry, but I must do so, otherwise we will run out of time.

Do you have practical examples of recommendations that we could include in our report, please?

Mr. Stéphan Déry: I'll give you a specific example. In the United Kingdom, if a tent is pitched, it is removed the evening of the same day. This is automatic and applies to everyone. In our case, it is not the city's police department that would remove the tent, but the RCMP...

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Déry. I am sorry to interrupt you, but the time is up.

The last round will go to Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor for two and half minutes.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

It is very distressing for me, as a person who's worked on behalf of veterans for so long, to hear about some of the activities that are happening that disrespect such an important monument in our country.

I have to reflect on the fact that I've had members from my own constituency back in B.C. come all the way here to bring a memento of a loved one they have lost. We arrange for it to be delivered. That process is incredibly sacred. People who protect that space receive it and bring it down below.... That person knows that the picture of their loved one, something that they've brought, is there to remember them. This is just so distressing.

I'm wondering, Mr. Chair, if I can, through you, ask Mr. Déry one more question.

With this happening and people surrounding that space, putting up tents and desecrating it—as we heard today—does this prevent any scheduled maintenance of the monument? I can't imagine you can go there to make sure that things are cleaned and taken care of.

You also spoke about the people who do these rounds. With this occupation, I'm wondering if they are any longer able to do those rounds and fulfill their commitment to that monument and to the people who serve this country.

Mr. Stéphan Déry: Thank you very much. That's an excellent question.

Mr. Chair, although my people are courageous and have done a lot during the last three weeks to support the City of Ottawa and Parliament, they are not police officers. They don't carry guns. However, they do continue, with police escorts, to do their maintenance and to do the work they need to do.

We're ensuring that the monuments we maintain are kept in perfect shape, and that if there's an incident, it is restored right away. Even in the middle of the night, our team will go out and fix it, to ensure that people don't have to see the desecration that has happened or the lack of respect that was made to such an important monument.

● (2010)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Through you, Mr. Chair, I hope you will pass on our thanks to these amazing people who are doing this sacred work.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you so much.

That's all the time that we have.

[*Translation*]

On behalf of the members of the committee, I would like to thank you, the witnesses, for your contribution to the study we are conducting.

I shall remind you that we had with us Mr. Stephen Harris, Chief Historian, of the Department of National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage; Mr. Stéphan Déry, Assistant Deputy Minister for the Department of Public Works and Government Services, Real Property Services Branch; and Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister for the Department of Veterans Affairs, Strategic Policy and Commemoration.

By the way, Mr. Déry, you can always send the security incident guide you mentioned to the clerk. We would be pleased to receive it.

Is it the pleasure of the committee members to adjourn this meeting now?

I am getting nods.

Meeting adjourned.

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