



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

ACVA • NUMBER 002 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

—
Chair

Mr. Rob Anders

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC)): Howdy, folks. We're back in business. I'd like to start the meeting by telling folks about some of the things that have transpired.

At the last meeting we talked about having the minister come in to either talk about budgetary estimates or kind of lay out a framework for what he's going to be busying himself with and what he thinks are the issues of the day. The minister has accepted to come to the committee.

We were originally looking at having him come this Thursday, but John Howard, the Prime Minister of Australia, is going to be kicking around, and he's going to be addressing the House at about that time. So we didn't think that would make much sense, because even though we love the minister, we would enjoy hearing from the Prime Minister of Australia—maybe even more so than hearing from the minister.

Rather than put people in that conundrum, we booked the minister for next Tuesday. He has accepted that, so that sounds good.

There's one other thing I think we should consider. This Thursday, the Prime Minister of Australia will be addressing the House at 3 o'clock, right after question period.

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, Lib.): No. Question period will be early, from 11 to 12, and the speech will be at 3 o'clock.

The Chair: Okay. Even though question period has been moved, because he's addressing the House at 3 o'clock and our committee meeting time is usually....

Oh good, there's an all-party agreement and all meetings have been cancelled. That's excellent. We don't have to deal with that. I thought we'd have to move the committee meeting, or whatever. So there will be no committee meetings that day. We all get time off from school because the PM from Australia is speaking.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Just to clarify when the minister is coming, you mean the next Tuesday we sit, not next week?

The Chair: That is correct. We wouldn't want to hear the minister speak when we have time off. That's a very well-put point, Mr. Sweet.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): As a matter of course, maybe we could invite all witnesses to appear when we're actually here.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: It's a good plan.

A voice: I'll second that motion.

The Chair: I like that idea.

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): It works so much better.

The Chair: Absolutely.

I'll also let you know that after the conversation we had at the last meeting, and some people expressing interest in the idea of the bill of rights, I told my office today to contact the Australian High Commission and the British High Commission for people they may have who can serve as potential witnesses. This isn't set in stone; I'm just trying to explore some options here.

When I was serving on national defence and veterans affairs three or four years ago, Mr. Benoit, who was the critic for the Canadian Alliance, had the Australians come by, and they gave us an excellent presentation. I was quite impressed with their people.

That being said, I think the first order of business, after kind of giving you a heads-up there, are the motions that were put forward at the last committee meeting by Mrs. Hinton.

Mrs. Hinton, do you wish to read those into the record?

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I read them last week. I can certainly do that again, if you wish.

The Chair: Does anybody wish her to do that? No? Is everybody all right with that? Okay.

Which one do you wish to deal with first?

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Whatever you wish.

The Chair: Since the first one on top was time limits for witness statements and questioning, which was 10 minutes for the witness, and subsequently the time period for the parties, why don't we deal with that first?

Is there any discussion?

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I'll move the motion.

The Chair: All right.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Is this a motion for the Auditor General, or the time limits?

The Chair: It's on time limits.

Is there any discussion?

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): I would like to have a discussion.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Perron.

• (1535)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: The Bloc stands to gain nothing whatsoever from the motion. The Bloc is virtually overlooked in the second round. It only gets to ask one question. In view of the number of Bloc members in the House, I think the party representatives should be given the opportunity to ask at least one more question during the second round. You're proposing the following order: Liberal Party, Conservative Party, Bloc Québécois, Conservative Party, Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Conservative Party, Liberal Party. Haven't you somehow managed to overlook the Bloc Québécois?

[English]

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I thought we had you covered here. I'll read it out loud:

That witnesses be given, at the discretion of the chair, ten minutes to make their opening statement, but during the questioning of the witness, the time allocated to each questioner will be as follows: on the first round of questioning, seven minutes to the representative of each party in the following order: Liberals, Bloc Québécois, NDP, and Conservatives; on the following rounds of questioning, five minutes per party, beginning with the Liberals, the Conservatives, the Bloc Québécois, the Conservatives, the Liberals, the Conservatives, and the Liberals, and in the third round the order would be the same as in the second round, with the NDP being able to ask questions at the end of the round; and that when a minister is in attendance in the first round of questioning, ten minutes be allocated to each of the opposition parties and ten minutes to the Conservative Party; and in a second round, five minutes to each party in the following order: Liberal, Conservative, Bloc Québécois, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, and Liberal, and in a third round the order would be the same as in the second round with the NDP being able to ask questions at the end of the round.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: I understand full well, Betty, but given the number of Bloc members in the House, I think that we should be allowed to ask another question during the second round. The Liberals get to ask four questions, as do the Conservatives, while the Bloc gets only one question. After the first round, we get to ask fewer questions. By the second round, the situation is totally unacceptable to us. To be fair, the Bloc should be allowed to ask at least one more question during the second round. Either the Liberal Party or the Conservative Party should lose the opportunity to ask one question.

[English]

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Gilles, did we do it that way last time around? I believe this is just a standard process here. Are we doing something different this time that we weren't...?

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: *Oui*, we are doing something different.

[Translation]

We're proceeding differently this time around.

[English]

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Thibault, go ahead, please.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Perhaps we could ask the clerk whether there is a typical questioning formula that you start with in most committees, or whether every committee does it differently.

The Chair: The clerk is willing to read into the record here the one we operated on previously, if that's any help.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Perhaps he could tell us whether the last one is the same or whether there is a difference.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michael MacPherson): You would have to substitute Liberal for Conservative.

A voice: Are you going to read it out now?

The Chair: I asked him if he would.

The Clerk: Oh, okay.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Or maybe just answer, is it different from the way it was last time?

The Clerk: I was reading through it to ascertain.... It's rather long.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Oh, all right. Go ahead.

The Chair: He's going over it with a fine-tooth comb, I think.

The Clerk: It appears to be the same, except you're substituting Conservative for Liberal.

The Chair: My sense here is that certainly in the first and second rounds, I think it almost perfectly accounts for the representation we have from all the parties in the House, given the number of Conservatives and Liberals we have. Then when you get to the third round, I sense that it's pretty much bang-on there as well. So it's just an even flow of the representation we have from various parties.

Mr. St. Denis, go ahead, please.

• (1540)

Mr. Brent St. Denis: I agree with what you said, that in the first two rounds it represents the makeup of the committee. How often we will get past the second round, I don't know. It will probably be a pretty rare occurrence, so we want to be sure our NDP and Bloc colleagues would be, at the very least, very early in the third round. I might propose that in the third round you just forget the idea of repeating the second round, because you'll never get deep into that third round anyway. Why don't you just go Liberal, Bloc, NDP?

A voice: Why would you leave out the government?

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Oh, I'm sorry: Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative. Just go down: Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative.

The Chair: So it's just changing the order.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: It is basically repeating round one. You have round one, round two, and then repeat round one, because you'll never get past that third round. I think we will often get past round two, but not very far.

So instead of Betty's suggestion that we repeat round two—

The Chair: We just start over at the beginning.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: We basically start again at number one; we have only two—

An hon. member: At five minutes, rather than seven.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Maybe you could cut back the time a little bit too.

Hon. Robert Thibault: That's five rather than seven.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: That's right. Round one the second time would be five minutes. Round one the first time is seven; round two is five; then round three, which is equal to round one, is five. I think that takes cares of—

The Chair: I'm okay with it, but I want to make sure my colleagues, who sit through these committee meetings, are okay with it.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: The reason I brought it forward the way it was is my impression, which was confirmed by the clerk, that it's identical to the last time around, so I didn't have a problem with the way the motion read.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'm wondering, was there a concern the last time at the committee about following this?

The Chair: I think, to be fair, Mr. Perron is the only one who's voiced an objection here.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Actually, there were two. The format was taken from the defence committee and the veterans committee. This is a new committee, a stand-alone committee. The way the fisheries committee does it is ten, seven, five, ten, and then five, five, five, five. It goes in that order.

If you're going to go seven, seven, seven, seven, and then go five, five, five, five, we don't have a problem with that. But if you look very carefully at this original motion, to be honest with you, we get our first seven minutes, and then that's it; we're done for the day.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: And that's what happened last time.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: That's right, and it's wrong. That's why it needs to change: to be more equitable. I myself would prefer, if you wanted to, to go ten, seven, five, ten, and then five, five, five, five. That's what our fisheries committee does, and this was actually brought forward by many of your colleagues on that side—which I liked. But if you're going to go seven, seven, seven, seven, then five, five, five, five, and just repeat the first round, only with five-minute intervals, at least we on this side of the fence will get an opportunity to ask a second set of questions.

The Chair: Let me make a suggestion, Mr. Stoffer. I think, frankly, by the look of concern on the clerk's face and mine, once we start getting into these funny tens, eights, sevens, and fives, it's going to make our lives a living hell. I would be more amenable to just simplifying it all at five minutes and go from there. That way, there's a greater likelihood that by the time we get to the third round, let's say, for example, you'll get an extra breathing room of eight minutes by skimming it off the first round.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: But, Mr. Chairman, if we don't get an opportunity in the NDP to ask questions in the second round, we're not going to get questions in the third round; it's as simple as that. So we would object to anything that says in the first round we're all equal, then in the second round we're not, and maybe in the third round we'll get back to you. That's something we—

The Chair: Okay. I'm just sharing some concern at the table up front here, in terms of—

Mr. Peter Stoffer: But I don't see what's wrong, sir, with going seven, seven, seven, seven, and then five, five, five, five, as the second round, and just keep repeating that if you have a third and fourth round.

• (1545)

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Chairman, I may have an objection to that. I don't mind going to something between what Mrs. Hinton is preparing and what Monsieur Perron and Mr. Stoffer are suggesting, but the original way, the way it's been working at every committee I am in, is that the official opposition gets a little bit more questioning time—we have more seats in the House. As long as, in whatever formula you work with, that is recognized...

I might make an interim suggestion, though, that would make it easier for everybody. We have a motion on the floor that's been circulated in due form and that we've had a chance to study. I would recommend that we vote for that motion for the appearance of the minister, so that we know how it will happen in the meeting with the minister.

It gives us three weeks to negotiate amongst the parties—to have a committee, with the chairman and the vice-chairmen, to look at whether you can come to a formula that's acceptable to everybody and present it at that time. It would include the orders of the appearance, so that you can take care of Mr. Perron's and Mr. Stoffer's concerns, but would maintain that official opposition role also.

The Chair: I'm certainly amenable to that, Mr. Thibault.

Monsieur Perron.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Since we're being allocated five minutes, we'll be able to finish this round and go on to a third one. For the sake of equity, I'm proposing that the government be allowed four questions, the Liberals, four questions, the Bloc, two questions, and the NDP, one question. That would mean nine five-minute questions, for a total of 45 minutes. The next round would last 28 minutes. That would give us a total of 93 minutes, or approximately one hour and 30 minutes.

[English]

The Chair: Just to make sure I understand that, the first round would be seven minutes for each party and then after that the second round would be an exact replica of what the committee is itself in terms of its membership. Is that right?

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: That's about right. The standings in the House are as follows: 126 Conservatives, 102 Liberals and 51 Bloc members. The Liberal Party has only twice the number of Bloc MPs. Why would the Liberals get to ask four or five questions, and the Bloc representatives only one? We should be allocated half the number of questions the Liberal have, or two, if I go by our party's representation in the House. We're being taken for fools. The NDP, on the other hand, has 29 members in the House, or approximately one quarter the number of Liberal members.

Mr. Chairman, if you want to be fair and to respect the Bloc representation in the House, you must allow my party to ask another question during the second round, since the Liberals get four questions. They have 102 MPs in the House, while the Bloc has exactly half that number, or 51 MPs. Therefore, you owe us one question.

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Perron, I understand where you're coming from, and yet the actual constitution of the committee is such that it's not a perfect representation of the House. We have the members we have.

Taking that into account, I think some members around the committee here would feel put out by that. I understand where you're coming from in terms of the House representation, but in terms of the committee, Liberals do have four of the—

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: That is the current situation. Besides, you are in a minority on the committee, just as you are in the House. The circumstances here in committee mirror those in the House.

[English]

The Chair: Let me be clear: I think it's the Liberals who would be the most upset with that arrangement.

I suggest that we go with Mr. Thibault's suggestion, which is to vote on this as it stands. Rather than having a big kind of run amok here at the committee to try to figure this all out, why don't we vote on this and then have somebody who wants to bring a specific change to this, a written-up motion...

Mr. Thibault.

Hon. Robert Thibault: I would agree with that, Mr. Chair.

So that Monsieur Perron understands, I don't disagree with what he's saying; I'd just like to see it fleshed out. I'd like to see it on paper to see if you can make that principle in the way that all parties can agree. We have a management committee to do that, so I would second the motion of Madame Hinton.

The Chair: Mr. Gaudet, did you want to add something?

• (1550)

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Chairman, you are also entitled to ask questions. In reality, you're a fifth representative. Representation here in committee is the same as in the House. The government has five representatives who are entitled to ask questions, while the Liberals have four, we have two and the New Democrats, one. What Mr. Perron is saying is quite true.

[English]

The Chair: Just as a point of information, I don't think the chair usually exercises his opportunity to ask questions or what not, unless you're all dry and tired and don't have anything you wish to pursue with the witnesses any further and I have to keep them for some reason.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Chairman, just for my clarification on this—and I apologize for being late—what we're voting on is what we were handed in the notice of motion. Am I correct?

The Chair: That's right.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Let me just read what it says, for the record.

The Chair: It is written in the record.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: This is after the first round. Just listen, and put yourselves in my shoes for a second.

On the following rounds of questioning, five minutes per party beginning with the Liberals, the Conservatives, the Bloc Québécois, the Conservatives, the Liberals, the Conservatives and the Liberals; and in a third round the order would be the same as in the second round, with the NDP being able to ask questions at the end of the round....

You know, I feel like a little kid who was too small to play on the basketball team: "Well, you know, for short players or if someone is injured, we'll get the NDP to play." That's unacceptable. No offence to you, Madame Hinton, but you say "Maybe the NDP will ask a question at the end of the third round, if there is time. Thank you very much for getting elected and for showing up."

Think about that, Mr. Thibault. You can't do that. Very few committees in this House—if the clerk researches—have that type of format. It's just unacceptable.

You can't ignore the NDP in the second round. You can change it to go Liberals, Conservatives, Bloc, Conservatives, NDP, Conservatives. If you want to do that, I find that acceptable. But to ignore us in the second round and then say in the third round, "Well, ladies and gentlemen, here you are", that's just unacceptable.

The Chair: I appreciate the dilemma, Mr. Stoffer, but I think this is an arrangement with a lot of committees.

I think there was a Liberal, Mr. Thibault, and then Mrs. Hinton.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Chairman, if that's correct, then we can ask the clerk to bring examples of what other committees do, because that's not how our fisheries committee works, and when I was on the defence committee, it wasn't like that.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Chairman, just so Mr. Stoffer understands, as well as Monsieur Perron and Monsieur St. Denis, I don't disagree with any of the amendments these three people are suggesting, and I don't disagree with the point that Peter raises.

Next time we sit, we have a presentation. All I'm saying is that we've had a motion in due form put forward at the committee more than six or seven days ago. Everybody has had a chance to study it, to respond to it, to prepare alternate positions and put them to the chair with 48 hours' notice. We haven't seen those. So rather than today having a game of ping-pong and mishmash and negotiating in committee about how we come to a more reasonable situation, I'm suggesting that we vote on the motion. If it goes through, we task our chairman and our vice-chairs with studying this matter and coming with an alternate proposal to be put to the committee at the end of business at that meeting.

I'm sure they can come to a resolution. Every point that has been suggested is valid, but they've all been a little different. If the people who disagree and have other suggestions had presented other suggestions, we'd have something on paper to look at and maybe vote on, but we've only had one proposal put forward in bilingual form with 48 hours' notice.

The Chair: Okay. I see Mrs. Hinton wants to speak and I see Mr. Perron.

I'm hoping somebody at some point will call the question.

Mrs. Hinton.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I'm listening very carefully to you, Peter. I didn't notice when you came in, so I'm not quite sure what part of the discussion you missed.

This is not a new creation. This motion that's coming forward is the standard one that was used in the committee the last time. The clerk confirmed that when he read it out.

I did give at least 10 days' notice. In future, if I or anybody else puts a motion forward, I would hope that if you have concerns about the motion, you'd come forward prior to the day of the meeting. You had a 10-day window to raise your concern and your objection.

This is just standard. I agree very much with Mr. Thibault, and I appreciate him seconding the motion. I'd like to see this pass so at least we have a format for when the minister comes. Then, if you want to change it or you want to do something different, I think this group is pretty easy to get along with. I'm sure we can accommodate.

• (1555)

The Chair: Did I hear the calling of the question?

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I would, but you have two other speakers.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Perron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: I totally agree with Betty and Robert. We could try and go with the existing formula, and then come up with a new one. As a cautionary move, I'd like to propose an amendment to the motion. I move that we agree to adopt this formula on a trial basis for the appearance of the Minister of Veterans Affairs, and that the steering committee undertake to propose other formulas for future meetings. I insist on getting this in writing so that we can get back to what we were're discussing this afternoon.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think the door is always open, but I'm not opposed to that.

Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Just for clarification, when you talk about seven minutes, is that for the question and the answer?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Well, at the start, it was for the question. I want to be clear, because when we came out of our other one, it was for the question and the answer, and that didn't always work.

The Chair: Okay. I think at this stage we're going to vote on the subamendment.

On the subamendment, for which I don't have the exact text, of course.... We don't have the 48 hour' notice, but the understanding that it's open—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: We'll go with this formula on a trial basis for the minister's appearance. Then, we'll consider your proposal, Mr. Chairman, along with your clerk and your research staff.

[*English*]

The Chair: Hopefully, everybody else understands as well. All right.

(Subamendment agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Motion as amended agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: There we go.

I didn't think it would take that long, but that's the way these things work. Oh, I'm sorry, it's not done. There's a second one to deal with, that's right.

Mrs. Hinton.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Now I'm a little nervous. The first one took so long, and this is pretty standard as well. It reads:

I, Betty Hinton, member of Parliament for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, move that the following two motions be added to the routine motions of the standing committee on Tuesday, May 16, 2006:

1) That whenever the main estimates or the supplementary estimates are tabled in the House, the committee invite the minister and any relevant senior officials of the department to appear at a meeting of the committee, which is televised if possible;

2) That whenever a chapter of a report of the Auditor General refers to a subject under the mandate of the committee, the committee invite the Office of the Auditor General of Canada and any relevant senior officials of the department to appear at a meeting of the committee, which is televised if possible.

The Chair: Fair enough.

Monsieur Perron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: I request a vote.

[*English*]

The Chair: Well, is it that simple? It sounds good to me. Are there any other considerations here? All right. I hear people calling for the question.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1600)

The Chair: Now, wasn't that sweet and easy?

Mrs. Betty Hinton: You should have just started with that.

The Chair: That's right. There we go, we have that dealt with.

I am assuming that what we're going on to here is the feedback that people have given the clerks when they sent around the question asking what people wanted to deal with. Does everybody have copies of that? All right.

Maybe the way to work this is for me to go ahead and read these in. I have one here addressed “Dear Colleague”. That is from the minister. Do people want that read in?

Hon. Robert Thibault: No, we all have a copy.

The Chair: Okay. You all have a copy. Fair enough. And it's bilingual as well. We'll put that aside.

I have responses here from, I believe, Monsieur Perron, Mr. St. Denis, Monsieur Thibault, Mr. Shipley, and Mrs. Hinton. Let's read through those then.

Monsieur Perron, I won't try to butcher your French, sir. I will do my best. I believe your first issue is talking about the Veterans Affairs ombudsman, the second is Agent Orange, your third issue is post-traumatic stress disorder, and your fourth was the awarding of disability pensions. That's a fair representation.

For Mr. St. Denis, the first was the veterans charter review process, the second was Agent Orange, the third was media, the Peace Tower flag regarding fallen soldiers issue—that's up in the House, I guess—and the fourth would be the Legion cenotaph support program.

Monsieur Thibault, your suggestions were, one, sustainability of the legions; two, veterans independence program, VIP, benefits for widows of war veterans; and three was medical leave.

The other submission from Mr. Shipley was the veterans bill of rights; the Veterans Review and Appeal Board; and the Veterans Affairs ombudsman.

Then Mrs. Hinton had veterans bill of rights; ombudsman for the department; and the veterans independence program, VIP.

Now, if we were to tally those up.... I'm going to do a separate chart here. I'll call it bill of rights, and the bill of rights has—

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Chairman, I passed on my preferences to you verbally, but I didn't hear them.

The Chair: Let me record these, and then maybe we'll go through the other members who happen to....

Hon. Robert Thibault: Can we get copies of that?

The Chair: I wish you could. I think we only have one.

A voice: It was just in various e-mails. It's not translated.

Hon. Robert Thibault: If we're going to look at what we'll be doing as the work plan for the group, wouldn't it make sense for us all to see what the others are thinking? I have heard them and heard them read, but I'd like to have them in front of me.

What I would suggest is that we start grouping these items together on the basis of similarity.

The Chair: That's exactly what I was about to do, Mr. Thibault.

If you were going to wait for us all to have copies of this, we'd have to wait for them to be reproduced, and then this would have to wait for a subsequent meeting. If I go about creating the groups or categories now—record with check marks how many marks are under each given person, and then ask those who haven't already sent in their list—I think we can skin the cat now.

Hon. Robert Thibault: That's fine, but I'd ask the clerk to send the original list to our offices after this meeting.

The Chair: Sure.

Is everybody agreeable to that? All right.

This helps. Why don't we circulate it? Does that sound like a plan?

Let's send some around and decide here. These lists will be circulated. Am I to understand that this list has all the suggestions?

A voice: Yes, except for Mr. Perron's.

The Chair: Except for Mr. Perron's.

Mr. Gaudet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Mr. Chairman, I'd like the committee to review the veterans charter approved during the last Parliament. Approval was given rather quickly, as everyone supported this initiative. I'd like to see the regulations that go along with the veterans charters and review them to see if they are consistent with the provisions of the new charter.

• (1605)

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Please bear with us for a second before we get into discussion.

I'd like to tally these up, if that's all right, and put check marks by these issues so we have a sense of where we are heading. What I'm doing right now is taking the list and checking off the ones that Mr. Perron sent in. Then I'll be going through the other ones, and we'll get to the ones who haven't sent theirs in.

Please bear with us for a few minutes.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Perhaps you could tell us what Mr. Perron's additions were.

The Chair: Yes, of course

Mr. Perron had the ombudsman, Agent Orange, post traumatic stress disorder—which is not on the list, so you'll have to add that. I put “PTSD” down toward the bottom. As well, there's awarding of disability pensions, which I had as new as well.

Hon. Robert Thibault: On post traumatic stress disorder, I see Mr. Perron is in line with the thinking of the minister.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: I don't know, but I've been fighting that for a long time.

The Chair: Now I'm moving onto Mr. St Denis.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. St. Denis suggestions aren't on this list either. I just wanted to add those of Mr. Perron that weren't on the list.

The Chair: Yes. The two that Mr. Perron had that aren't on this list are PTSD and disability pensions.

I've finished those four check marks, so now I'm moving on to Mr. St. Denis's suggestions.

Veterans charter.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Well, the review process, but I guess you could include it under there.

The Chair: Okay.

Let me ask you, Mr. St. Denis, do you want the second one under bill of rights or the new veterans charter?

Mr. Brent St. Denis: No. Stand alone.

The Chair: To be fair, the way it's technically working is that there was the previous veterans charter, and we'll be looking at a new veterans bill of rights.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: I meant review under the recently adopted veterans charter. The bill of rights is future—

The Chair: Okay, so you want it under the charter. Fair enough. I'll put the check mark there.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: On the other correction, I would add under the half-mast flag Peace Tower, the media at repatriation—the whole issue of repatriation of a deceased soldier's remains. The two issues came up at the same time.

The Chair: Okay. I'll word that as “media at ceremony”, “media at repatriation”, and the other one as “Peace Tower”.

So there was a second vote for Agent Orange, one for the media at repatriation, and one for the Peace Tower. Legion cenotaph...I'll put that at the top here.

At some point we'll have to deal with this, because some people are giving us five suggestions rather than just three, so we're skewing things a little bit.

Mr. Thibault had “sustainability of the legions”. Fair enough. So I'm putting a check mark, Mr. Thibault, under Royal Canadian Legion.

VIP...right. Is medical leave on there? Yes, it is.

Mr. Shipley has veterans bills of rights, veterans review and appeal board, and the ombudsman—that's a double check mark now.

Mrs. Hinton has veterans bills of rights, ombudsman, and veterans independence program.

Now let's look at some of the ones we don't have. I'll maybe leave this open for whoever wants to contribute first—those people who don't already have something submitted in writing.

Who wants to volunteer?

Mr. Rota.

• (1610)

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): The three that I think we should look at are: the half-mast Peace Tower flag—it's already on there—PTSD, and the cenotaph program.

My decisions were partly based on looking at how much time we have. You have to be reasonable about what we can get involved in and do successfully, as opposed to taking on something huge that we won't be able to accomplish.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: You have most of the requests we have here, but I'll include pensions—superannuation and disability pensions.

The Chair: We have included pensions. That was added by Monsieur Perron. So I'll put a second check mark there.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I agree with Mr. Rota. Time is running short, so we have to pick a couple of things we can do very quickly—maybe not a full report, but a letter of recommendation to the minister, or whatever.

Most of the ones I mentioned to you before unfortunately deal with defence. Some of these issues deal with the defence department, not necessarily the veterans department. That distinguishing line between....

For example, I'd like to have the sale of medals at flea markets and garage sales outlawed. But I've been told that's not what a veterans committee looks at; that's what the defence committee looks at. There are other issues regarding that.

The one I'd like to move on the most that I think can be moved very quickly is the extension of the VIP program to before 1981.

The Chair: Okay, so I'm going to put a check mark for you under VIP.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: If we did one thing prior to the summer, that's the one I'd like us to move on. We're not talking about very many women here, and every day that goes by they pass on. If we could move something of that nature very quickly, then the remaining women who are left—the widows, in most cases—would be helped.

The Chair: Just to clarify, is that your second vote then?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: It's my third, fourth, fifth, and sixth vote.

The Chair: All right, we'll leave it at that.

Mrs. Hinton.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Actually, there are a number of members here who are in the same position, but I have an advantage, having sat on both the defence committee and the veterans affairs committee, and I don't have quite so much trouble sorting out which falls into which category. Half-masting is defence, media at repatriations is defence, and superannuation is defence. So those are all things that we really, as a veterans affairs committee, don't have any say over.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: You can only look at them; you can't make any recommendations.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Yes, defence could probably look into this and actually accomplish something. All we could do would be to make some sort of recommendation, which would probably fall on deaf ears.

The Chair: Mr. Valley.

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): We would hope it doesn't fall on deaf ears, because we can bring it to this committee.

We do think veterans would have a lot to say about the half-mast. That's my number one tick, but I think it's up to somebody to go to Canadians and find out what we want for a new policy. We're not saying there's anything wrong with the 80-year-old policy, but what we'd like to say is that maybe it's time we looked at it. Maybe we'll reaffirm that this is what we should be doing. But we should have some kind of say. Some committee should look at it. I don't know that it's right to pass it off to defence. Let's talk to the veterans from across Canada about this. Let's find out what they want to do with this. I think it's up to us to find a new policy, to take it out of the political atmosphere, which was very sour the last time we had to repatriate some unfortunate soldiers from Afghanistan. So I think it's up to us to do something about that.

That's my number one vote. Number two would be the Royal Canadian Legion issue. Number three would be the VIP.

The Chair: Okay.

Now I'm going to go to Mr. Sweet and Mr. Mayes, if they have anything.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A bill of rights would be my first vote, then the ombudsman, and then the VIP.

•(1615)

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Mayes.

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): My first choice is a bill of rights for veterans, and my second choice is the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, and I have the Royal Canadian Legion cenotaph as my third.

The Chair: Okay.

Do we have Mr. Gaudet? Mr. Perron, we do have yours.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: I didn't give a ranking. I gave you a lunch, but I didn't rank it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I'm just taking check marks, Mr. Perron, but all right.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: My first choice would be post-traumatic stress disorder. My second would be the ombudsman file, while my third would be the pension plan.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, because with yours, I think I wrote down four. Now if you can read those—I apologize again—I'll circle the ones I had.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: My priorities, yes, okay.

My first choice is *stress post-traumatique*, my second choice is the ombudsman, and my third choice is the pension.

[*Translation*]

I'm talking more specifically about the disability pension plan.

[*English*]

The Chair: PTSD, oui. All right.

Oui, Mr. Gaudet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I concur with the choices of my colleague Gilles.

[*English*]

The Chair: There you go.

I think at this stage we have everybody except for me, because I haven't chipped into this yet. I'm going to make this easy, because I'm just going to look over the check marks here and probably go with the ones that...

It seems as though we have a very clear indication that the veterans bill of rights is ranking highly, as is the ombudsman, as is the VIP program. So just for the sake of making it easy, I'm going to go with those as my three choices. That way we have six under the veterans independence program, we have six under ombudsman, and we have five under bill of rights. So there you go. I think those are our top issues. Fair enough?

Yes.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

Before I leave, I'd like to introduce to the committee two outstanding young Americans over here who are visiting us on an intern program. We have Jacqueline from Kentucky and Josh from Michigan. They're just in the back right over there. Folks, welcome to Ottawa.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peter Stoffer: There are about 50 of them here, scrambling around the Hill, infiltrating the Canadian parliamentary system, spying on us. So be very careful.

The Chair: I've had some Michigan students in my office as well. They're a good bunch.

I think we now have a sense of what the top three issues are that we want to be dealing with. We know the minister is going to be coming in on the next Tuesday, two weeks today. We have the Australian Prime Minister and therefore no committee meeting this Thursday. I guess we're going to be waiting to hear, and to perhaps undergo some negotiations on, what some of the other members may want with regard to the time allocations for witnesses.

Unless there's anything else, I think we'll move to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting is adjourned.

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

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

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.