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Chair

Mr. Rob Anders

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•(0905)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC)): Good morning. Welcome to another meeting on veterans affairs.

Today we have Ray Kokkonen, national vice-president of the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association.

Sir, as you know, we're doing a study on the veterans independence program and health care review. Generally, we allow you twenty minutes and then have questions from various people around the table.

So, sir, the floor is yours.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen (National Vice-President, Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association): Mr. Chairman, respected committee members, guests, as was mentioned, my name is Ray Kokkonen. I'm the national vice-president of the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association, representing our president, Tom Hoppe, who is unavailable.

I have no written statement to place in front of you, nor do I have a prepared formal statement. However, I would like to explain a little bit about the circumstances of my being here. About 9:30 yesterday morning I was planning a salmon fishing trip in Trout Brook, New Brunswick, and I received a telephone call. So here I am.

In further explanation, I am also not a specialist in advocacy matters for veterans. I am more of a governance type, and as you've probably recognized by now, there's another component to these veterans communities, and that is comradeship. I'm also involved in that.

Needless to say, I had to do some quick reading, and to tell you the honest truth, I am not sure of how much value I will be to you this morning. However, I leave you to judge that.

I would like to point out that the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association does support strongly the direction in which Veterans Affairs, with the advice of the GAC, is heading in terms of veterans services. I think there is a lot of good work going on, and it seems that it will continue to go on. I have the minutes of the last meeting of the GAC, and I don't want to get into this discussion of information passage. I'm not sure whether you have them yet or not; they're in draft. I recall from Mr. Allard's presentation the discussion about the minutes from the Senate committee.

Anyway, I have referred to that in my research. I've also talked with the man who is our specialist in advocacy matters. Unfortunately, today he's attending a meeting in Calgary dealing

with the new Veterans Charter, because he also belongs to that group.

So that's a bit of excuse making, I suppose, but as a clear point, I represent generically a very large group of veterans with probably the broadest age spectrum of any of the veterans groups, bridging over 50 years of United Nations peacekeeping operations and other terms of peacemaking and peace support. It's a group that does not readily fit into a system that was specifically designed for aging war veterans.

I leave you with that, and that concludes the statement that I do have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

Now we're going to go over to Mr. St. Denis, with the Liberals, for seven minutes.

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here.

I'd actually like to start with your final comments, and if I misrepresent in any way your final comments, please let me know.

I took it that you thought the community you represent, the retired peacekeeping veterans, faced a whole different set of circumstances when they left the military versus those who left after World War II and Korea, the two other principal situations. And obviously the numbers were also different. The numbers we dealt with as a country, post-World War II and post-Korea, were a lot different from the numbers we face with peacekeeping veterans, because they tend to leave, I assume, on a continual basis as opposed to thousands at a time.

For example, I have a little house across the river in Hull in a little neighbourhood called Wrightville, off Sherbrooke. That whole neighbourhood was built...they were called homecoming. That's what I was told. There were hundreds of houses that were built right after World War II. They're all the same, brick houses with no basements, and they were for the military. So there were programs.

Could you just talk about it a little bit more...? Are you a peacekeeping veteran yourself?

•(0910)

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: That's correct, sir.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Maybe talk a little bit about what you faced when you left the military, and as much as you can, maybe anecdotally, the anecdotal information you have of your colleagues, your comrades, and what they faced, and what was not there, possibly, compared to what was there for Korea and World War II veterans in the context of health and the VIP because there are a lot of widows out there. There are a lot of veterans who are aging, so could you talk a little bit about that?

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I think it's first necessary to understand that all of the peacekeeping veterans are in fact professional military people. And it can be argued that perhaps the only real soldiers were the ones from the war; however, of those people who did go through the war, very few of them remained in for further military service. So there's a distinct difference in the nature of the person who serves as a peacekeeper as opposed to a war veteran, and I think the same thing applies to the Korean vets and so on. Therefore, they are very much a part of the Canadian Forces, or the Canadian army and the Canadian Forces, system of care, regardless of what happened to them.

As you mentioned earlier on, it was a continuity of people leaving under the care of the Canadian army, the Canadian air force, the Royal Canadian Navy, and the Canadian Forces. Because of that, perhaps there are no distinct points to note because it has been a progressive thing.

However, from personal experience, I had no difficulty. I had no disabilities. As an artillery officer I came out of service with an H-1, which nobody can believe, so I can't even claim a hearing aid.

However, I am aware of many colleagues who now, with advancing age, are running into various difficulties. Their cases are under consideration by the appropriate offices when they submit their claim and there are various stages. Some people are disappointed. Some have their wishes fulfilled.

I think there may be an element of opportunism involved in the seeking of various pensions, and I think we all have to be aware of that as well. What the degree is, I'm not sure.

I have not seen very serious cases, personally, of peacekeepers having difficulties with the "system". However, in conversations with people who have come from a more volatile peacekeeping, peacemaking, peace support operation, such as Bosnia, it becomes a bit more problematic. There are people who apparently have fallen off the edge at the end of their service and so on. I can't elaborate in specific detail about that, but there are cases of which I have heard.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Just last Friday I met with a constituent and his wife. He would be in his late sixties. Is it possible that he was in peacekeeping Germany in the sixties? He was in Germany—

• (0915)

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: No, sir, that was a NATO—

Mr. Brent St. Denis: He was NATO, in Germany, pardon me. Let's say that he was a professional, in the sense that he signed up to have a career in the service. He probably faced what a lot of peacekeeping veterans face. He was in transport. When he was injured, he wanted to stay in but his medical condition did not permit him to stay in—at least that's what he was told—and it was just as difficult for him to be injured as it was to leave. He felt like he was

being ripped away from his larger family. Even though he had a wife and two children, he felt the military was his larger family. For soldiers who sign up versus those who sign up for a war, say World War II, you say they're different people, typically. How much, in your view, are the health support requirements of our veterans dependent upon the fact that they are leaving a life they love? So they're injured physically, in this case, or have PTSD in another, but they are then ripped away from their family. I would think that would add to their poor health.

Do you have any experience, or could you comment on that part of it, that you are not able to continue in the military, even in some other way? He thought he could, but in his case he could not.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Clearly, the military has set standards of physical condition and injuries and disabilities. That has been tested over many, many years. If your military occupation demands a certain physical state, then if you don't meet that, you have the choice of either being transferred to another occupational area or being released. I can't put any sort of qualitative statement on that. In my opinion, the system does appear to work.

Now, it is traumatic to leave the military. After 35 years of regular force service and with 15 years in retirement now, almost every night I still dream about being in the military.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: If I could just conclude, the perversity of the situation this constituent was in was he couldn't stay, but he had a heck of a time proving that he should qualify for health benefits. In other words, he wasn't fit enough to stay, but he was too healthy for the health benefits. So I imagine a lot of our veterans face that Catch-22 or perverse situation.

The Chair: Your time is up.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: My time is up. I'll be happy to ask more questions later.

Thank you, Mr. Kokkonen.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. St. Denis.

Now over to Monsieur Perron with the Bloc, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Good morning, sir. I apologize for—

• (0920)

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: First, I want to apologize for the lack of class we showed by not advising you until 9:30 yesterday morning that we would like to meet with you today. That was a bit impolite of us.

Since you didn't have a lot of time to prepare, perhaps I would like to talk to you about salmon fishing, but instead we'll talk about your association. If you need someone to go with on your next trip, I'm available.

What is the average age of members of the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association?

[English]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I would say it ranges from about 55 to 70. It bulks out between about 60 and 65.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: So they're not necessarily suffering from the same aging problems as Second World War veterans, even if they will eventually have to deal with those issues.

[English]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Regarding my statement about the statistics, of course we have people in their 40s as well, and possibly some over 70. I did want to comment on Mr. Allard's commentary. I think it was at the beginning of the transcript from the 5th of June. I think this number changed later on, but initially it said "a frail veteran at age 65". I am a 65-year-old veteran, but I don't feel terribly frail yet.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Police officers are taking part in some peacekeeping missions. Do they join your association at some point? They are part of a mission for nine months, after which they return home. How do the soldiers and the police officers get along?

[English]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: We welcome police officers as members, and in fact at this time I am negotiating with a retired RCMP staff sergeant who lives in Halifax to hopefully get him to set up a chapter of the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association in Halifax. He would then probably become the president of that chapter.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: I want to change subjects. You know, since you came to testify regarding the bill moved by my friend from Elliot Lake, that diplomats and civilians had been added to those individuals to whom we will pay tribute on August 9. How does your association see this alliance?

[English]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Our membership is based on the government definition of veteran, and I would like to return to the idea that a veteran is a veteran is a veteran later on. But yes, in that sense, all veterans can join, but there is no provision for civilians at this time with service in operational areas, as you suggest. Civilians may be associate members; however, now that you have mentioned it, I want to take this under advisement and approach my association with that thought.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: If we decide to pay tribute to them on August 9, we need to find a place where they can park their car. It's good to pay tribute to these people, but if they go back home, it's not really worth the trouble.

You said that your association has been awarding a commemorative medal since 1997. Is this medal awarded to police officers and diplomats who have distinguished themselves during a peacekeeping mission and to civilians from non-profit organizations working to maintain peace through humanitarian efforts?

[English]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I am not absolutely certain, but at this moment I don't think the generic United Nations peacekeeping medal is given to civilians; however, I could be wrong. I'm not aware of that at this time.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Perhaps that would be something else to think about.

I'm a bit surprised to see that, in your statement, you continue to refer to the United Nations. Would a peacekeeping mission that is not sponsored by the UN but rather by NATO or another organization be recognized by your association?

• (0925)

[English]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Absolutely. If I used the term "United Nations", it was inadvertent because we know there are many—as we discussed here during the meeting about the Peacekeepers Day, and it was brought out very clearly—colours of berets out there, not just the blue. There's orange, there's green—and they all fit into the umbrella under which I belong.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: The beret colour, as you mentioned, indicates that they answer to NATO or other peacekeeping associations with which Canada is associated.

[English]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: In our association, as I mentioned earlier, the membership is based on being a veteran under the definition given by the government. It is basically someone who has held a military occupation code and was honourably discharged. This means that someone can belong to the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association by having gone through basic training and trades training, then having served maybe three years in Gagetown, and then being honourably released. That person is eligible to become a member. There is no limitation, particularly when it comes to other people who have served in operational theatres of some sort, such as NATO and other areas like that.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: I don't want to put you in the hot seat, but I'd like to know whether you foresee the possibility of including citizens in your association.

[English]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Mr. Chair, perhaps I could answer that question. I hope I'm not being timed.

The Chair: There are no limits upon you, sir.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I have taken notes. I think this is a very important point. In my personal opinion, I think it is quite correct that civilians should be included as bona fide members, full members and not only associates, if they have done that kind of an operation. Other civilians who have not done anything in that sense I think will remain as associate members.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for being understanding.

[English]

The Chair: I don't think we got a translation. She said it was inaudible. Anyhow, I'm sure it was a cute expression. In that light, I'm sure there will be many other cute expressions and questions coming up.

We'll now move to Mr. Stoffer with the NDP for five minutes.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Sir, it's good to see you again.

One of the concerns we have, as you are fully aware, is that by the end of this day this country will lose another 120 World War II, Korean, and modern-day veterans and/or their spouses. One of the concerns we have, of course, is when the veteran passes away, what happens to the widow or widower?

We keep hearing from previous and current governments that they're doing this review, or that review, but every day they delay there's another 120 who don't get the services they probably require. What should all of us, not only government but members of Parliament, be doing from all parties to ensure that the services you have provided are also assisted, because when you're going through your hard times...? You had 35 years in the military, and I'm sure a lot of those days were the best days of your life, but a few of those days were the worst days of your life.

I know that as people get older...like in the movie *The Flags of Our Fathers*, where the opening scene is an elderly gentleman and you see him shaking, it's his wife who is looking after him. That spouse or partner you have is a great source of comfort. When the veteran passes on and they're left behind, what more should we be doing in order to assist them, and how quickly should we be moving on it?

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I'm not really qualified to say because I don't know enough about the background, but I do have some interesting statistics here. Currently, I think there are 298,000 who are war service survivors, and I assume those are widows and widowers; 22,500 receive services for housekeeping and grounds care; 28,400 are in long-term care facilities. In answer to your question, it seems that we are doing something. I don't know, am I arguing on behalf of someone here?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: The problem is there are restrictions. If you make a certain amount of money, you don't qualify.

• (0930)

The Chair: Forgive me, Mr. Stoffer, I believe there's a point of order.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): I seldom do this in the committee, and I have great respect for Mr. Stoffer and all the passion he has, but I don't think we should put a witness in a difficult position to make a comment on government policy.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I didn't.

Mr. David Sweet: I understand, but when asking how fast someone should move on it, that's the Government of Canada, and I don't think we should put our witness—

Mr. Peter Stoffer: In great fairness, Mr. Sweet, I didn't mention a particular policy. I asked for services for veterans and their spouses. I didn't specify which ones.

What should we be doing as parliamentarians? It's not just previous or current governments, but all of us and what we can do to make sure their needs are met.

The Chair: Before we carry on with the discussion, I generally allow our committee members a great deal of leeway. I leave it to the witnesses to sleuth out the politics of the matter. I understand where Mr. Sweet is coming from, but I'll say that it's probably a point of debate.

Mr. Stoffer, you're free to—

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Chairman, I was just responding to Mr. Kokkonen's discomfort with the questions.

The Chair: I understand.

Well, Mr. Kokkonen is a—

Mr. Peter Stoffer: With 35 years of service, I don't think he's in discomfort at all.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Could I just say something here?

I will return to my original statement: I am not qualified to answer that question.

The Chair: You're perfectly welcome to say that—

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Absolutely.

The Chair: —whenever you want and however you want, as is Mr. Stoffer able to search for a comment on things that people can't comment on.

Mr. Stoffer, you have another few minutes.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: For my second question, as you know various veterans organizations are having difficulty retaining membership. We have a variety of groups: the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada Association, the Royal Canadian Legion, and the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association.

Have there been any discussions you're aware of where maybe these groups—I know they work together on certain issues—could eventually become one organization? For instance, the National Council of Veteran Associations in Canada, the Royal Canadian Legion, the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada Association, would all be under one umbrella. Would that even be advisable, in your view?

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I think the possibility of the Legion becoming an umbrella organization is a continuation of the discussion that went on with Mr. Allard. In fact, a stated mission objective for the Legion right now is to become that organization.

I'm also a Legion member, so I have no problem. However, I think the nature of the beast, of the veteran, will exclude that possibility, because everybody seems to coalesce around their particular type of service. For instance, if any veterans organization thinks they will capture the Afghanistan vets, I'm sorry, that's not going to happen. They will form their own association, because they have had their own experiences that are unique compared to everyone else. I don't think there's any chance at all of them trying to become part of some umbrella organization. We understand that, of course.

The veterans understand that being divided decreases our strength as an overall community. However, when there is an attempt to do something like an umbrella organization, then the jealousies and the self-interest and the power plays come in. Those are not good words, but that's human nature.

So I don't know what the possibility of an umbrella organization being formed is.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stoffer.

Now on to Mrs. Hinton with the Conservatives, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Good morning, sir. It's always a pleasure to see you. I appreciate you coming on such short notice.

As a new government we've increased the spending for new veterans by \$523 million, and we've added 12,200 veterans and widows to the new VIP program. This committee is examining ways that we can increase that, and until this committee reports, there is not going to be very much forward movement.

I'm thinking in terms of your particular association. The previous government cut travel rates and treatment benefits. I hear a lot of negativity from veterans in my own area about how that's impacted them. I'd like you to comment a bit, if you would, on how that has impacted members of the peacekeepers, if it has in fact impacted them.

They cut \$59 million from veterans in 1995 and another \$10.7 million from veterans in 1998. We all recognize that those had some very serious impacts. What we're trying to do now is to increase the number of veterans and their widows who qualify for VIP programs and improve the health care system.

One question I'll ask is if you could personally change one aspect of the system as it is now, what would that be?

• (0935)

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: That's a very tough question. I would have to examine that at some length.

As a knee-jerk reaction, I would say there is a requirement to refine the evaluation and assessment tool. I think there is one under examination by GAC—it's a French term, SMAF—which would allow a seamless type of entry of veterans into care, or at least an evaluation of a veteran's needs. The evaluation would be needs-based rather than an overall blanket thing.

Again, that comes from a not very knowledgeable person.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: It would be needs-based versus a means test. You want to open it up more.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: That statement is based on logic, not on actual knowledge.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Well, I happen to agree with you.

You've answered me as well as I could expect. I know Mr. Sweet would like an opportunity, and I'll split my time with him.

Go ahead, please, Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you.

I actually had a couple of points here that I wanted to try to galvanize a question with. You did just make a very vehement statement that nobody is going to capture the Afghan vets, yet there are a substantial number, and we've heard evidence that they feel displaced, etc. You mentioned your personal experience, and that it's traumatic being disassociated from the service. No matter how much we would hope that it wouldn't happen, it happens after an injury. There's a certain kind of therapeutic, cathartic—whatever word you want to call it—element of fellowship that happens. If you want to go back to the *Band of Brothers* series, there's that identity that happens among themselves.

We've had witnesses here from the OSISS program who particularly highlighted the fact that when someone who has had military service now deals with someone with an operational stress injury, the bond that comes from serving in the military, and that can only come from there, gives that added dimension of capability of really hitting somebody in the heart. All of that said, do you see any way for the organizations that exist today—the particularly big catchment would be the legions—to try to address the veterans?

We've had veterans here from Bosnia as well who felt they were displaced. Is there anything that your organization...or do you have any ideas to try to capture the hearts and minds of these folks so that they have a place to come to, so that they have a place of continued brotherhood, so that they do heal and have prosperous lives after their military service?

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: That is our vision, stated almost that way, and that vision includes veterans from every walk of life. As I have stated before, that's our membership definition. However, like the other organizations, we as an association recognize the need for some type of communal organization, perhaps structured in a way that doesn't take away the uniqueness, the independence, and the autonomy of the organizations. That's the only kind of an organization that would work, and I think the Legion is trying to head in that way a bit.

However, from the point of view of the peacekeeping veterans and a number of other organizations—and I don't think it's any secret—so much of the leadership of the Legion is civilian. That doesn't sit particularly well with former professional military people, regardless of what they've done, and that's a bit of a negative from the Legion approach.

• (0940)

Mr. David Sweet: So that's a possibility of renewal.

I asked because the other thing we consistently heard from those who were testifying before the committee on this report was that if they can get to the veterans who aren't aware of services and allow them access to health promotion programs, they live out the rest of their lives much healthier and much happier. The Legion has this network of buildings; you could virtually have at least a physical health facility in each one, and it's one of the few veterans associations that does. One of the reasons I asked was obviously for the psychological, mental, and emotional health of the veteran, but also because this network can engage the whole person and really see an outcome that's going to be substantive, not only for the older veterans today but for those who will age in the future as well.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Yes, I certainly remember that from the transcript of Mr. Allard's statement, the possibility of the official Canadian Forces psychiatric centre or whatever coming under a different name, and it will be called the same thing; I think it was operational stress injury social support. That certainly makes sense. The Legion is the only organization that has that infrastructure as well.

I'll give a specific example from Miramichi, New Brunswick. Most of the Legion building has been sold because they just couldn't keep it up. I think that's happening around the country as well.

I would like to add another term here when we talk about aging veterans. I haven't seen it anywhere in writing, but I would like to propose "veterans aging with dignity". Am I coining a new phrase here, "veterans aging with dignity"?

Mr. David Sweet: Absolutely, that's what we're talking about—having a full, dignified, prosperous life after service.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I think that describes VIP in a sense.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Kokkonen was concerned when he first got here that his testimony would not be of value. I just want to say for the record that this first round has been very valuable. So thank you very much.

The Chair: Very kind of you, Mr. Sweet.

Now back to our friends, the Liberals.

Mr. Cullen, for five minutes.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): And you can say that with a straight face?

The Chair: A straight face and a bright smile.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Kokkonen. Being a fisherman myself, I can appreciate the sacrifice you made to come here—and being a salmon fisherman as well.

Now you haven't made the ultimate sacrifice, and maybe not even the penultimate sacrifice, but I think you've made a keen sacrifice. Of course, you made a sacrifice by serving your country in the way you did. I'm wondering if you'd be prepared to say where you did serve us, sir, as a peacekeeper, which missions.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I served in Germany with NATO and I served in the Middle East. UNEF (2) was my specific mission, but I've been to every one of the other ones that existed in the 1970s, and also to Cyprus, but not long enough to have earned the medal.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Thank you.

I was in Cypress in 1972. Were you there around that time?

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I came through in 1969.

Hon. Roy Cullen: I was there around Christmastime, actually, and I went to the base. They had a midnight...I wouldn't call it a mass; I think it was interdenominational, but it was like a midnight mass in a big Quonset hut. I got chatting with some of the military people—that was in my previous life—and they all seemed to enjoy the experience. That was the time of the UN convoys through the Turkish area, which we did.

There's been a lot of discussion lately about peacekeeping, peacemaking, combat role for the military.

Is there another association called Canadian peacemakers? How does that work?

• (0945)

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: There are basically the two organizations that are specifically intended for peacekeepers but not limited to that. That's ourselves, the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association—as I've already said, our membership definition includes anybody who is under the government definition of veteran—and then there is the Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping. Don Ethell was the leader of that organization for some time. They do define their membership to those people who were involved in peacekeeping, whether it was operations...but they also list in their documents that it includes peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peace support. And peace support is the big term now, as far as I know.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Okay. Your organization doesn't make a big distinction between peacekeeping and peacemaking. I'm wondering if you have read Senator Roméo Dallaire's book, *Shake Hands with the Devil*, about the situation in Rwanda some years ago.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I have a signed copy of it on my coffee table, but I have not finished it. I've known General Dallaire, as I mentioned earlier on here.... We were captains together, and he did end up being much more successful in his career than I did. Sorry about that.

Hon. Roy Cullen: I'm not so sure about that. Anyway, I'm sure you've served with pride and distinction yourself.

I'd recommend you finish reading it. It's quite a story. It's a sad commentary on the inertia or the lack of action or the politics within the United Nations that caused so many people to lose their lives unnecessarily.

Within your organization, when you're sitting there—I can't imagine you'd ever sit down in the Legion and sip the beer—but on those rare occasions, or within your own association, do you discuss the difference between peacemaking or peacekeeping? Do you have any views on that or do you just stay away from that topic.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: It is the subject of casual conversation at times but nothing intensive that leads to anything.

I don't understand exactly where you're going with this line of questioning. I think everybody recognizes there are different kinds of operations, depending on the situation and what the troops there do. However, I'm not sure whether that distinction matters to the veterans themselves. It may matter as far as pensions and eligibility for services, depending on what has happened in that particular operation.

Hon. Roy Cullen: I'm not a permanent member of the committee. I'm substituting for someone, so my knowledge of the topic is quite limited. I was sort of winging it, in a sense, more out of curiosity than anything else.

Given that, I'll pass to other, more learned colleagues.

The Chair: Your timing is impeccable, Mr. Cullen. I wish all committee members came in on time as well as you do.

Mr. Gaudet of the Bloc is next for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Kokkonen.

I apologize for being late. I was not here for your presentation.

I would like to know whether you have the same benefits as the Peacekeepers, police officers and civilians, and the same health care services as veterans.

[*English*]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I think war services has different legislation completely from the peace force. I am not sure exactly what the differences are. I know the peacekeeping veterans have access to various services, depending on the circumstances of their injuries and what they relate to. But I don't know the details.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: The Veterans Independence Program and the health care review are on today's agenda. That's why I'd like to know whether there are any health care services that you are lacking.

• (0950)

[*English*]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I'm not aware of any lack of health care services. I assume you mean for the peacekeeping veterans as opposed to the whole community.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I did, yes.

[*English*]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I am not aware of any sort of missing components, but that's another question I am not qualified to answer.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Thank you very much.

Do you have a hall where everyone who has taken part in a peacekeeping mission—peacekeepers and others—can meet?

[*English*]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: It's rather interesting that our meeting place is the Royal Canadian Legion building in Miramichi. The Legion

allows us to meet there. We have a general meeting every two months and an executive meeting preceding that. We also hold social functions in the Legion building, and we have an extremely good relationship with the Legion overall.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Listening to you talk earlier, I had an idea. It might be trivial, but I'm going to share it with you anyway. You talked about the Canadian Legion and the fact that, in many places, legions are closing their doors. Why not rename the legion with "Canadian veterans"? This would apply to soldiers, men and women, of the air force and land force as well as the navy who have taken part in peacekeeping missions. What do you think?

I think that there is a date set for your meeting and discussion.

[*English*]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I think, of course, that this is returning to the notion of the umbrella organization. But there is a second theme to it, and that is that this would be, actually, the use of the infrastructure that's there. I certainly appreciate what the Legion is doing for us. But on the umbrella organization, I have to return to what I said earlier.

Again, there are different movements afoot now. For instance, we, as an organization—the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association—have applied for a name change to the Canadian Armed Forces Veterans Association, which would make us generic in nature. It would also even include, by clear definition, police officers who had served in that kind of thing.

Again, I think there are probably movements afoot by our other peacekeeping organization as well, although I have not heard about it. So there's the Legion and us. And I don't know whether the ANAVETS and the Gulf War Veterans Association are attempting anything of that nature.

Clearly, there's thinking and some form of action going on in that area and in that direction. I think all the veterans recognize the benefits of trying to create something like that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Gaudet.

Now we'll go on to Mr. Shipley, with the Conservatives, for five minutes.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Kokkonen, for coming out this morning. I agree with Mr. Sweet's comments to never underestimate your input to what we're doing. We are talking about a VIP program and the expansion of that, along with health care for our veterans. That obviously expands out to not just our veterans of all types, in all areas, but also to their families. And that's a significant change in what we're looking at.

What we want to do is try to be as expansive in this and get as much knowledge as we can. I think you've offered a lot in that.

What we've garnered and what we believe, in terms of health care—and we have spent a fair bit of time on post traumatic stress disorder—is that we need to actually start from the time an individual signs up to become a member of the Canadian Forces. We need to consider those things, through testing, right from the time they go through the Canadian Forces, which is under Defence, through their transition from Defence to being veterans, then as veterans through to the end of their lives. So we have this time when we're trying to bring them together rather than have separate silos of issues.

One of those things comes about in different organizations, and you've touched on that a little bit. I don't want to just focus on the Legion. There are a number of associations. I think bringing these together is really important.

I'm wondering if you have some comments about how we, as a committee, might make some recommendations as to who to have in this or on the process we might have to help.

When they become vets afterwards, those associations play an important role. You know, you talked about the legions being disconnected—that wasn't your word—but there are so many civilians in them. How do we link? Everybody has their own priorities of what they want to do that is significant. How do we bring that together? The veterans, when they get out, look for areas of help. Do you have any comments?

•(0955)

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Are you asking what you, as a committee...?

Mr. Bev Shipley: Well, what we're trying to do is bring witnesses in to help us help the veterans in terms of prevention and assistance throughout their careers and right through to their becoming veterans. How can we help them in the best way, and their families, quite obviously? I'm just focusing a little bit on the organizations, because there are so many of them. How do we bring them together, or do we?

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I don't know. I think you are doing the best you can, as far as I can see, in having witnesses from the various organizations appear here to have a full, in-depth hearing. Look at me. The Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association is not a key player in this specific issue—and again, I go back to the war service veterans and the aging population and GAC and so on—yet you are giving me a full morning here to express my views and to answer questions and so on.

I cannot see how you could do much better. I know you afford that courtesy to all the other organizations. I know there are a number—I think somebody said there are 56 different organizations out there—but I think a large group of them are umbrellaed already.

Mr. Bev Shipley: One of the things I found interesting—and I'm a new member on this committee—is that a week ago we went out to a place called the “centre”. It's a place for the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs. It's sort of a melting pot, for lack of a better word, where these two ministries and organizations work together as much as they can for that transition. They try to work with individuals who become part of the Canadian Forces, as they go through that, if they run into issues concerning health, and certainly any mental disorder that may come through post-traumatic stress.

Then how does that link in the transition with the veterans, if there are...? I don't know if you're familiar with that, but I'm wondering if you see those types of things as a big benefit. We're expanding those, opening up more centres across Canada.

Is communication important between National Defence and Veterans Affairs, in terms of health care for our vets?

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Clearly, yes.

I have had some experience with contact with the centre. There's a military person, Major Gilles Paquette, who runs the CF side of it. I have spoken with him, and I think it's an ideal type of interface organization.

Mr. Bev Shipley: I'm out of time too.

Thank you so much for coming.

•(1000)

The Chair: Now on to Mr. St. Denis, with the Liberals, for five minutes.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yes, I agree with my colleagues; this has been extremely helpful this morning, Mr. Kokkonen.

Mention was made of the infrastructure that most notably the Legion has. There isn't one member without at least one Legion. In the case of my large northern Ontario riding, there are about 18 different legions. They are so well represented throughout our smaller communities, it would be a shame to lose any of that infrastructure. Those buildings are located so conveniently for people, so not only would it be a shame to lose them, but I think it would also be a shame not to better utilize them.

Mention was made of some 57 organizations representing different facets of the military veteran. This is understandable because there's a certain comradeship, given a theatre of operation or similar experiences.

But is it generally accepted by veterans at the legions that if the federal government—and I know this is a recommendation that hopefully we'll discuss this fall, as we continue this study—were interested in finding ways with the legions in particular, because of the buildings, and other organizations to deliver programs to help disabled veterans, injured veterans, whether there are physical or mental injuries, such as operational stress injury, PTSD...? Do you think there's any merit in at least looking at the possibility of helping the legions help the federal government help veterans in a more proactive way by delivering some programs?

I don't want to get into what those could be—that's to be discussed—but it might be an opportunity for the legions to become a contractor, to receive some income to help the federal government deliver to veterans certain kinds of programs. Is there any merit in that at all?

It might maintain the buildings. At the same time, because the legions are so close to the communities, their ability to deliver might be well beyond the ability of the federal government to deliver any other way.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: It's a rather big question with a number of immediate implications.

In the transcripts of Mr. Allard's appearance he mentioned a number of times that the Legion does not receive any government funding. I think this sort of an arrangement would automatically assume that there would be some sort of funding.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Basically on a fee-for-service basis.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Secondly, it would clearly indicate a preference or an anointing of the Legion as the organization by the government, and it would almost set the course for the establishment of some sort of an umbrella organization under the auspices of the Legion, which would not necessarily receive favourable response from some of the other organizers. I'm not even expressing an opinion here. I'm only stating those things that come to mind as part of that question.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: That's what I wanted to find out, what the reactions might be. Maybe it would work, maybe it wouldn't. The only way to find out is to ask people, so I appreciate your comments.

Should such an idea be pursued, is there any way that some umbrella organization, again so that maybe one organization isn't picked out among the rest...? Is there any way that the federal government could use existing infrastructure? Is there any way that the valuable infrastructure of people as well as buildings—there are networks of people too—could be used to deliver health services, whether it's peer counselling, whether it's just a network of support, or information? Is there any way imaginable for that to happen with the cooperation of the various veterans organizations and the government working together? Not that the federal government would be.... It would be simply, as I would see it, a contract for services. The organizations aren't buying into government policy outside the specific program being delivered.

I'm trying to think of an example. From time to time you'll see, say, the YMCA take on a program in the area of health, say health promotion, or take on an initiative of a province, for example, to promote a certain health aspect of fitness. So is there any potential at

all, or would we be whistling in the wind? I'm going to ask the others as well, as time goes by, but your opinions would be valued.

• (1005)

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I think there is a degree of potential there. Again, I go back to the other possible problem areas that I pointed out earlier.

I think it would be a very admirable thing and an ideal thing to establish some sort of a network, which does not exist at the moment. There is a sort of rudimentary assistance network out there in terms of giving advice and perhaps helping veterans solve health problems, or at least in accessing agencies that can solve those health problems. The service officers of the Legion are an example of that, and that is a national network.

For instance, our own organization, the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association, follows that model. We also have service officers. However, quite often, rather than being of an assisting nature to have access to health services, we usually like to find lawyers who will take an advocacy role with a veteran who is having problems accessing, so it's not quite the same thing. But there are networks out there already of some sort.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Kokkonen.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. St. Denis.

Now on to Mrs. Hinton for five minutes.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Thank you.

I think perhaps your having served as a witness previously and having served as a witness again today, you can see that the committee has interests in a great variety of things, and that may be one of the reasons it's not always right on target as to what it is we're trying to deal with. But what we're trying to deal with right now is improvements to the VIP program and the health care benefits.

So I'm going to give you an opportunity, and I recognize that you seem to have been kind of dropped into this position today. I apologize for that. But I would like to give you an opportunity to maybe relay any kind of feedback you've had from members of your organization regarding what their needs might be in terms of the VIP program, because you did say that they run from 55 to 70. Also, you may want to talk about what you personally or what your association feels would be improvements to the health care system.

Those are two things I'd like to give you the opportunity to perhaps respond to.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Certainly, to answer the second one first, because I'm not familiar enough with the system, I don't know what improvements could be made. I don't know.

But touching on the first one, certainly from general conversation with my fellow members, the feeling is quite clear that if you served your country in a setting that is recognized as operational in some sense, then you should have the same rights of access to care and services that war service people do—because what actually is the difference?

However, this raises the question of “a veteran is a veteran is a veteran”. Does the same thing then apply to someone who served in Gagetown for three years and then got out, but then had a vehicle accident, or whatever, with a neck injury? How do those relate?

I'm not sure where the boundary would be drawn there, once that person gets out of the Canadian Forces system and becomes a veteran. I don't have an answer on what should be done with that person.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Given your experience as a peacekeeper—and you did mention a number of the countries you'd served in, including Germany and Cyprus.... I recognize that each peacekeeping mission is a little bit different, but there's a myth out there that seems to be perpetuated, which I have done my utmost to kill, that peacekeeping missions are somehow safe and there's no fear of any harm coming to a peacekeeper. The average person in the general public, when they think of a peacekeeper, thinks of a person who's handing out candy or doing goodwill sorts of things.

My experience, from what I've learned, not only from this committee but also from four years of being heavily involved with veterans is that peacekeeping missions are oftentimes far more dangerous than actual combat missions, because you never know who's coming at you, and from where, and you have a very limited mandate as to how you can respond.

So I'd just like to give you an opportunity to perhaps explain to the public at large the dangers of being a peacekeeper, because it isn't all roses and handing out candy; it's a very dangerous thing to be doing. So I'll just give you an opportunity to elaborate, if you wish.

•(1010)

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I think the psychological perspective is that because there are less occurrences of the types of things that go on in Afghanistan, the unexpected actually cause more tension, in some sense. It's not to say that if you're driving in a LAV down a road in Afghanistan you're not under tension as well, clearly.

I have never been in a firefight as a peacekeeper, which seems to be a common occurrence in Afghanistan, and it certainly was during World War II. But I was mortared as a peacekeeper when I visited UNIFIL on the Lebanese border, at the time I was serving in Egypt. I actually was mortared when I was in Camp Pearson. So those things happen.

I don't in any way try to compare peacekeeping or peacemaking missions with what is clearly a war situation—whether it's called that or not in Afghanistan—and where there is an actual hostile interface of fire all the time. Peacekeeping operations are not normally like that. But then again, Bosnia was another situation where there were open firefights—

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Or Rwanda. There were all kinds of them, yes.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Yes, there were. Now, Rwanda was a peacekeeping mission. Unfortunately, there really was no chance for any response from the United Nations people there.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I can't imagine your frustrations at those situations.

The chair is telling me my time is up, so thank you very much.

The Chair: Than you, Mrs. Hinton.

Now on to Mr. Stoffer, with the NDP, for five minutes.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I'm fine, Mr. Chairman. If someone else would like to take up the time, I'm fine.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Hinton, do you wish to continue with your line of questions?

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I will pass to Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Bev Shipley: And we're done.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet: *Fini.*

The Chair: Over to the Bloc, to see if they have any questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Yes. I really like talking with my friend Raymond.

I want to come back to the issue of civilians. This subject intrigues me. Bill C-287, tabled by my friend Brent, will lead to some concerns. I agree to recognize the contribution of diplomats and civilians taking part in peacekeeping missions, but this will raise questions.

For example, if you and I take part in the same mission and we both get injured, since you are a member of the forces, you would be taken care of by Veterans Affairs Canada, but I would not. I think that, within the framework of a recognized mission—and I'd like your confirmation on this—civilians should obtain the same health care services and other benefits as veterans or military personnel. Should that be the case?

•(1015)

[*English*]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Do you really think I'm going to stick my neck out there?

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Yes. Why not?

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Based on how you presented it, of course. That ignores all of the existing circumstances and facts and regulations that govern those civilians, and so on, so I'm not touching that part of it at all. But common sense seems to indicate that it would be appropriate.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: In other words, should an individual officially taking part in a peacekeeping mission lose a hand, for example, he should obtain the same compensation, no matter what colour uniform he is wearing. That is my opinion. I think that we are more or less on the same wave length in this regard, and I appreciate it.

[English]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Actually, I won't add anything more to my comments. As I said, I don't want to stick my neck fully into that particular hole.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: We will talk about it during a salmon fishing trip.

I want to come back to the 57 associations. When the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association has a meeting, can it use the Canadian Legion halls? Are your two organizations so separate from each other that you have to hold your meetings in a basement or a hotel? I am talking about your association and the 57 other affiliated associations.

[English]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Speaking on behalf of my own organization, yes, there's widespread use of Legion infrastructure across the country. We do that in Miramichi. I know they do it in Victoria and in other places. It's normal, because there is such a good relationship between the organizations. In fact, most of our members are also Legion members.

Just to expand on that a little bit, because of the aging population within the Legion, at least among the war service veterans, many of them now are not able to participate in activities like parades and so on, and if they do, they're sitting down. So we are taking a larger and larger role in marching down the street on Canada Day, for instance, wearing blue berets. We also participate in Legion activities such as poppy sales. In Miramichi, for instance, more peacekeepers are selling poppies than actual Legion members.

That was just a little aside to indicate how well the organizations meld together.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: I am not asking you to tell me what is wrong with such and such an organization, but I'd like to know whether, in general, the 55 other associations show the same kind of cooperation.

[English]

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: We have a close relationship in terms of communication and consultation with the other peacekeeping organization, CAVUNP, the Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping—a very close association with them. In fact, I think there are places where we share chapters in the same communities. But as far as the other organizations go, yes, there's a friendly relationship but there isn't the ongoing continuous communication. That's the relationship.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Okay. I have finished.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Perron.

Now to our Liberal colleagues. No, okay.

I sense then, Mr. Kokkonen, that you have reached the end of this gruelling questioning.

Thank you very much for taking the time to appear.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: I think committee members enjoyed it, and I think we learned a great deal. Never worry about showing up here not knowing exactly how things will tumble and unfold. There are lots of questions around this table and we have much to learn. We haven't been in the situations you have, so we learn a great deal from our witnesses.

Thank you very much for your presence here today.

• (1020)

Mr. David Sweet: We certainly hope that Mr. Kokkonen is going to get the opportunity to catch a lot of salmon.

The Chair: Oh, yes, absolutely.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: Mr. Chair, could I comment on that particular issue?

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: I want to share some of the blame for the short notice. In fact, this committee, through its clerk, gave sufficient notice for this to happen, but it was an internal CPVA communication problem that caused me to get cut short. I wanted to mention that because we had discussed that previously with the clerk of the committee.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I come from B.C. If you're a salmon fisherman, if your love is salmon fishing, I invite you to come to my particular province at any time; it's pretty nice.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: That's God's country out there, I know that.

Mr. David Sweet: All penance is quickly given for salmon.

The Chair: Fair enough.

I noticed a couple of committee members were about to sprint off. We do have some other committee business to deal with, so I'd ask that they stay.

Mr. Ray Kokkonen: If I may, Mr. Chair, with your permission, I thank the committee, its members and you, Mr. Chair. You took a very intimidated person this morning and you turned him into a talking machine here. I appreciate that very much.

Our organization appreciates very much and recognizes the good work you are doing. I think you are so key in everything to do with veterans. You are going in the right direction, and you are examining everything, all the information that's available out there, and as far as we can determine, so far, you have made very wise and astute decisions. We thank you for that.

The Chair: That's very kind of you, sir. Thank you.

I see people up and getting around. Stay in the room. We have some other things to deal with.

There is this issue of when the House will break. I don't know. I have no crystal ball on these matters. My general sense, for whatever members wish, is that I believe the government whip is waiting to see what will be done with Bill C-52, or the budget, in the Senate. If the Senate sees fit to have that budget bill move out of there without significant amendment, then I think the House will rise for the summer. If the Senate makes substantive amendments to the budget, then I think the House will wait until that bill has a chance to come back and be re-amended by the House.

Anyhow, that's all in the hands of the Senate, and I understand there were probably discussions with regard to this amongst the official opposition caucus on Wednesday morning, which I was not privy to, but I'm sure the issue was raised.

That being said, we do have questions. A lot of other committees are wrapping up their business and closing down for next week, pending the House closure.

Monsieur Gaudet, I notice you had your hand up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I move that we immediately stop our work. There is no point since we won't be here next week. Why call witnesses and make our clerk and our researcher work on other things? They will start to complete their reports and, in September, we will be wearing to go. I don't know whether the other members have a different suggestion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Gaudet.

Mrs. Hinton.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I believe we probably will be here next week. I have a notice of motion I want to put in front of this committee. Unfortunately, it requires 48 hours and I did not have 48 hours, so I couldn't put it in front of the committee today. I'll go with the will of the board. I will, if necessary, send a memo to each member in both French and English as to what that motion is. We can deal with it when the House reopens, if in fact the House does go down before I believe it's going to go down.

Otherwise, I'd like to present the motion. We can call an ad hoc meeting, if you will, because I want it dealt with.

• (1025)

The Chair: I understand that—

Mrs. Betty Hinton: The motion is for clarification from the committee as to what direction we're going to go in. We made a decision at the very beginning of this committee's sitting as to what it was we were going to discuss. We have discussed a bit today with the peacekeeper witness, a bit about what's going on with VIP, but we need to move forward with VIP. We've been talking about something else for probably the last seven meetings, which is extremely important, and that is the PTSD issue, but that is not what we planned as a committee to move forward with. I need some direction from this committee. I've asked it before.

If the committee prefers to go down the road of the PTSD or look at some other issue, then I need to know that this is the way it's going to be, so I can instruct government to carry on with the VIP improvements without the committee's input.

The Chair: Before we carry on this discussion, I want everyone to understand where we are in the process.

Mr. Gaudet has moved a motion to adjourn, basically, for the summer. I would be willing to second that. I do consider it a valid motion.

The issue that then comes up is that Mrs. Hinton can't propose a motion while we're dealing with another motion, but she can talk to the motion and, in doing so, raise this issue of potentially raising a motion after we deal with Mr. Gaudet's motion. We're still speaking officially to Mr. Gaudet's motion, but you can talk as you wish with regard to the broad spectrum of things relating to it.

Mr. St. Denis.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Are you saying I can or can't talk about Betty's motion?

The Chair: The motion on the floor is Mr. Gaudet's. I will also add that for Ms. Hinton's motion to be accepted, because it requires 48 hours' consent, etc., we'd have to have unanimous consent for her to move the motion.

You can speak as you wish, knowing those things.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: That's pretty clear.

The Chair: I think it is, actually, Mr. St. Denis.

We are dealing with Mr. Gaudet's motion. Just know that Mrs. Hinton, afterwards.... Well, if Mr. Gaudet's motion were to fail, then Mrs. Hinton would probably raise her motion and ask for unanimous consent to present it.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: What I would say about Roger's motion is that while probably in our heart of hearts we all want to get out of here ASAP, it's outside the ambit of our committee to determine that, obviously. If we are here, nothing says we can't have a business meeting.

I'd be concerned, Roger, that if we adjourn the committee, we couldn't meet Tuesday morning to discuss business. We don't need witnesses to do business. That would be my only concern. I support the spirit of it, which is let's get to work in our ridings. However, I wouldn't want to close the door that if we are forced to be here, we couldn't at least meet to do business.

The Chair: Mr. Gaudet, I don't know if we can amend that or make that a friendly amendment. I'll let you speak to that.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: That we adjourn with respect to witnesses.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I got an update this morning and I think that all the committees are finishing their work today. I don't know whether Mr. Roger is aware of what is happening. Holding a meeting just to hold a meeting, would this change anything if we finished today or next Tuesday? Give me a good reason for me to withdraw my motion. So far, I haven't heard any. If we are still here next Thursday, I will be angry. I want to be in Parliament to work, but not to chew the fat.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Gaudet, I understand where you're coming from on this matter. I also suspect we may not be here. It is true that other committees are wrapping up.

Mr. Shipley.

• (1030)

Mr. Bev Shipley: The government clearly wants to have some idea where we're going, yet I want to respect Roger's motion. We have another half hour here. As far as having committee input, we could deal with Roger's motion if he will defer it until the end of the meeting. We could have some discussion about where we're going, where this committee wants to take us, for another 20 minutes.

The Chair: You can discuss it within the parameters of the motion, but since the motion has been put I don't think we can say we're going to push the motion.

It's perfectly fine for you to discuss these matters inside the motion. But I would caution the committee that at some point, whether it's next week or whatever, we will have a break of three months. I imagine you will bring fresh thoughts about the proceedings of the committee three months hence. Anyway, I leave you to ruminate on those things.

Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet: I appreciate your point of view as well, Mr. Chairman, but time is always of the essence. The health care review is very important. Even the opposition parties continually go back to the VIP program. We know it's important to everybody to try to make sure that the whole health care review can feed into a sustainable, broader-based program.

I also understand the clerk's difficulty in trying to get witnesses. But if there's any kind of work we can do next week that doesn't depend on getting witnesses from far-flung areas, we should do it. If it's a local witness, it won't be a big inconvenience to them if we cancel them because we can't go ahead with the meeting. But if there's some aspect of the health care review we can get moving on, then I think we should.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Hinton.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I don't object to the motion before the committee right now. I bow to the will of the committee. I tried to make it clear earlier that my motion would have been in front of you had it not been for the 48-hour notice.

I can't meet the 48-hour notice, but I can send you the motion in writing so that each member has a copy of it. It'll be in both French and English, because as you all know, it takes time for the interpretation portion of it. I'm perfectly content to handle it that way if the House goes down. I just want you to be aware that it's the first thing I would like dealt with in September when we come back.

I'm not trying to make things difficult for anyone, but we definitely need an understanding at this committee as to which direction we're going. So I'm perfectly willing to vote on Mr. Gaudet's motion at this time, and I will serve notice in writing to each member.

The Chair: Monsieur Perron.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: We are talking for the sake of talking. We are currently discussing a motion. I understand Ms. Hinton's position and I'm prepared to ask her to send us her motion by e-mail. If the chair decides, after obtaining Ms. Hinton's motion, that we need to meet urgently, he has the power to say that there is a meeting Tuesday or Thursday.

I think that we should vote on Mr. Gaudet's motion and you should exercise your power to call us back here Tuesday or Thursday if you determine that Ms. Hinton's motion should be debated. I so move and I would call the question on Mr. Gaudet's motion.

[English]

Mr. Brent St. Denis: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...for a friendly amendment to Roger's...?

The Chair: We are getting into dicey territory because people are asking that the question now be put.

Mr. St. Denis.

• (1035)

Mr. Brent St. Denis: I was just going to ask, Roger, simply to reflect what Gilles has said, that we adjourn the ongoing business of the committee, unless the chair feels the need for a business meeting on Tuesday, whatever the date is. It's sort of like semi-adjourning, allowing only a business meeting Tuesday, on either Betty's stuff or something else.

I also wanted to ask whether the intent of your motion is to suggest that the committee, in any way, has held up the VIP study.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I think that seven weeks of discussion on PTSD, which I feel is a very important subject, has in fact, perhaps, held up listening to witnesses directly on the VIP program, which we need to move forward with quickly, as evidenced yesterday when we had an 80-year-old widow paraded in front of the media to make a point, which is that this committee is supposed to give input to the government. If the committee doesn't want to give the input, I need to know.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: A point of order, Mr. Chair, or maybe it's a point of debate.

When it came to the bill of rights, the committee's input was not required for the government to make an announcement. The government department is doing its own review. Nothing stops the government from announcing today what it's doing with health and veterans' health and VIP.

I don't think it would be correct for Betty to in any way suggest that the committee is to blame for any delays by the government on VIP. That's the only thing I want to be careful of.

The Chair: That's not a point of order. I'll take it as a point of debate.

What it comes down to right now is that we have Mr. Gaudet's motion, and the question is whether or not Mr. Gaudet wants to see Mr. St. Denis' intervention as a friendly amendment or not, or just proceed, if he wants, and carry on with the motion as it is.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I agree.

[*English*]

The Chair: Bear with me, so we understand the amendment before people vote. We have to make sure these things are clear. The understanding, then, is that if the House is still sitting, there will be a meeting; if the House is not sitting, let's consider...

Whether or not we have a business meeting is at the discretion of the chair.

Mr. Roger Gaudet: If you want a business meeting....

The Chair: Is there any discussion on the amendment?

The vote, therefore, is on the amendment that we have a business meeting, if I so determine and the House is still in session.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Back to the main motion as amended.

Are there any speakers?

The motion as amended, I think we all understand. I don't need to repeat this.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, happy summer.

We will see you in the fall.

The meeting is adjourned.

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