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Thursday, February 28, 2008

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Chair

Mr. Rob Anders

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC)): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

It's been a while since we last had a chance to sit down and break bread eyeball to eyeball.

Today we have a shortened committee meeting, as you well understand, because we have a vote coming up on a fairly important budget-related issue at 5:15.

Some things I think it would be good for us to deal with include some of the future witnesses and the situation with our travelling to Petawawa and Valcartier.

I imagine we'll probably want to have a discussion with regard to the gleanings we've gained from the visits to the various bases. We'll have some thoughts. I know I have some things to contribute and share on that matter. If we want to, at some point we can also probably think about setting a time for looking at the budgetary estimates, because we haven't had a chance to really delve into that yet as a committee.

Anyhow, having said that, maybe I should start us off. I'm glad to see that some of you are raising your hands. Bear with me a second, as I'm just going to contribute a few of my thoughts with regard to our recent base visits and get that off my chest.

I'm just scrolling down here—excuse me while I do this—to find where I made my notes. Where did I make those notes? Oh, here we go. These are my notes on health care review.

One of the notes I had down here was getting rid of the 67-day in-theatre requirement to get decompression in Cyprus. I'm trying to remember exactly, but I think it was in Cold Lake that some of the people we visited said that even if somebody was in theatre for 10 days instead of 67, they may suffer some sort of traumatic incident, etc., that would certainly put them in the category of requiring some sort of decompression or of dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, etc. We can examine that in terms of its value. I think it probably is a fair point.

This was an interesting point. People talked about mini-decompressions being a good idea throughout their deployment in-theatre and the ability to get away from theatre so they didn't feel the stress of theatre. I understand and I appreciate this idea, but the fascinating point about it is that from talking with some of the people I know who are active in service in the military, I know that does happen. They do receive either a week or two weeks off, I think,

after so many weeks in-theatre. I've heard that some of them leave Afghanistan and go to various places—Bali, etc. So while I think the idea is a valid one, it's also something that I think actually does happen.

That's fair enough. It was interesting they would mention it, even though it seems to be going on already.

One of a number of issues we've dealt with before is the idea that they have a single caseworker to deal with. It seems that having to bounce around from caseworker to caseworker in dealing with Veterans Affairs or what have you was a real frustration for a lot of them. I thought that was a fairly cogent point that we've heard a number of times.

Another point we heard when meeting with the military families—I believe it was at Cold Lake, but it might have been Comox—had to do with allowing the spouse to deal with caseworkers on behalf of the veteran. I thought that was an interesting suggestion, because sometimes the veteran is not, in a sense, the person best able to face up to their PTSD or what have you. I thought that was an interesting point.

Obviously we've heard many times the idea that more doctors and PTSD counsellors are needed. That, of course, is always a function of money and time for training, because we don't just create them out of cereal boxes; it takes time to actually produce those people.

The question of whether a family social work assessment should be mandatory was also raised. We recognize that a family social work assessment is good, but because certain members of the family and certain members of the military are not active, in a sense the government really doesn't have a right to compel them to undergo a family social work assessment, even though it's probably a wise idea.

Anyhow, those are some of the thoughts I had off the top of my head. We do have a draft report that Michel produced for us, and I think these things are all adding to that.

We do have a speaking order. I think I saw more than two hands up, but I could be wrong. Anyhow, I'm going to go with the list we have. I have two on the list, Mr. St. Denis and Mrs. Hinton, and I think there is also Monsieur Perron.

I'm sure there were other hands up; please indicate, and we'll add you to the list.

We'll go on to Mr. St. Denis.

•(1535)

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

I probably have more to say than my time allotment will allow, so I'll probably have to break this up into a couple of installments.

First, on a technical matter, Michel wasn't able to go, so Melissa, a colleague, joined us for the trip and did a capable job.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): She was so nice.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Presumably she was able to take notes, so in the normal course of events she would summarize the trip.

It was very unfortunate that our Conservative friends on the committee were not allowed to go. That's what I take the case to be, because—

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): That's incorrect.

An hon. member: Not these two.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): [*Inaudible—Editor*]...mentioned right at the outset.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: No. I know you couldn't go, David. Anyway, as it turned out, if you didn't know, there was only Rob there for the first two days, and there were no Conservatives for the last two days of the trip.

•(1540)

Mrs. Betty Hinton: We were called back.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: No, they didn't go. We were here in Ottawa. They didn't go.

I'm not making an issue of that. It's your party's business to tell you guys what to do and what not to do.

We missed you. Those days in Shearwater and Cold Lake were fantastic. They were incredibly interesting, and some ideas came out of those two meetings that didn't come up at the first two and didn't even come up in all the hearings before, so I want to be sure to underline how wonderful the meeting was at Cold Lake.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): It was Goose Bay, Labrador.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Goose Bay, Labrador—did I say Cold Lake, Labrador? It was cold, though.

Mr. Todd Russell: There's not a warm lake in Labrador at this time of year, I can guarantee you that.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: It was a cold lake—

Mr. Todd Russell: They're all cold lakes in Labrador at this time of year.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: —in Goose Bay.

I made some notes. Combined with Melissa's notes—and my colleagues will have their own ideas—a few things came out that I would certainly want to see us discuss around the table for inclusion in a meeting.

I'll just mention one. There was a passionate plea by the senior guy, the major who was taking the next group to Afghanistan, about

the degree to which a head of an assignment in Afghanistan.... This relates to PTSD in the field and what happens when they become veterans. In some cases, they're away from families for up to 11 months. There are five months of training, they may come home for a week or two, and then they're back out for six months.

We support our military, but at the same time, we can't ask them to do more than they are physically, mentally, and emotionally capable of doing.

It's because of the assignments they're having to take and because the retraining.... The training you need to go out in the field has to be renewed every so often. Is it every two years or something?

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: It's every two years.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: It's every two years, so if you're in Afghanistan and then you go back in two years and one month, you have to redo the whole training again.

I know it doesn't directly relate to.... That's operational, that's DND, but we're in that zone, and it became clearer than ever to me that there is a transition time that both our committee and DND need to be engaged in. They become Veterans Affairs clients as soon as they become veterans, which is the day after they leave the military, so there is a joint responsibility. Right now they're treated as being in silos. You're with DND until you're not with us, and then you're with VAC if you're not with DND. It just seems to me that the whole idea of the transition is worth.... It may be only a statement in our report that the transition itself just needs to be looked at more carefully.

There were some other ideas I had, but on a personal level, it was unfortunate that some of you weren't able to go. You missed a couple of really good meetings. I leave it to others if they want to say anything else about it.

Our staff did no bragging on their own; they just sucked all the changes in. I know they did a tremendous job in having to cancel a trip and then put it back on track within a matter of hours. They just did what they needed to do as professionals, and they were very professional about it. I just wanted to mention that.

I'll leave it at that for now. Those are some ideas from my little book of notes that I'd like to put on the table as we get back to the report. I'm not sure if Melissa actually prepares a little summary or something that we can look at; that would be good.

We should probably pick a date to wind up the report. I know it's essentially done, except maybe for some tweaking based on this last trip. As soon as we can, I think we should wind it up, because no one knows when we're going to be into an election.

The Chair: I'd like to respond. Then I'll allow Mrs. Hinton to carry on with the next one. Then we have Mr. Perron on deck as well.

First off, the concept of being away from their families for 11 months touches my heart too. I think it's usually supposed to be six. I know I've met people on board some of our frigates who are in specialized trades and who have been there for 18 months. This was during Operation Apollo in the Arabian Sea. It was because it's a specialized trade, and they didn't have anybody to fill the spot. It's very unfortunate, but if you don't have someone in those roles, the ships literally wouldn't operate properly. It's very unfortunate, and hopefully there's a way we can hire some more of those people in specialized trades.

I agree with regard to the issues about transition from DND to VAC. We hear that occasionally.

As far as the date for the report is concerned, I think part of the reason we are discussing this here today is that we do want to produce something for the House. Having said that, though, I do ask committee members to keep in mind that we do have budgets already approved for travel to Petawawa and to Valcartier; you may not want to produce the report before you travel there, given that you're travelling to Petawawa and Valcartier for the purpose of producing the report. I'm the guy who has to represent you at the Liaison Committee to get you funding for these things, so I ask you to be cognizant of that.

As for my absence on the second leg of the trip, I was sick as a dog. I picked up a flu in Cold Lake. Anyhow, these things happen.

Now we'll go to Ms. Hinton.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I regret that I wasn't able to attend, but I was never scheduled to attend, and neither was my colleague Mr. Sweet. I'm sure there was a lot to learn and a lot to be gained by going directly to the bases.

I listened carefully to what my colleague Mr. St. Denis has mentioned and also to what my colleague Mr. Anders has mentioned. I heard a bit of a mix in there of things that fall under Veterans Affairs and things that fall under Defence.

I'm wondering whether it would be possible for us to spend some time casually after the meeting to draw the line between the two, and if there are recommendations members on this committee feel should be forwarded to the defence committee, perhaps we should do that. There's a definite line between what is Defence and what is Veterans Affairs, but because we're dealing with the same people eventually, it would be rather nice to be able to follow through smoothly. A couple of the things Rob mentioned and a couple of the things Brent mentioned fell into those categories. On this trip you were basically dealing with serving members, so that would definitely be the Defence purview, but there was a mix.

Are you shaking your head to mean no, Roger? There was a mix.

• (1545)

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): There were lots of retired people there who were on pensions.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Good, so you had a mix; that's wonderful to hear.

Again, I regret it, and I echo the sentiments of Mr. St. Denis: it's unfortunate that sometimes in a minority government situation there is some paranoia, and when two or three members from the

opposition pull out, then the government pulls back our members. It's unfortunate, and hopefully on the next two trips we're scheduled to make, which are closer to home, that won't be a problem.

The Chair: I think Ms. Hinton makes a fair point about our commenting on whether it's 6, 11, or 18 months. That's the serving military; we get them when they're done. Okay, that's a fair point.

Go ahead, Monsieur Perron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Mr. Chairman, the first part of the trip to the west coast was cancelled by my whip. He told me that I could not go to the west coast because I had to be back Tuesday for the vote. It was impossible to make arrangements to travel there on Sunday, come back Tuesday and then return again.

I'm going to speak on behalf of my colleague, Roger Gaudet. He was absent following the death of a political colleague in his riding, where Roger used to be mayor. It was more important for him to say goodbye to his friend and former colleague for the last time.

I greatly appreciated the experience and I greatly regret the decision of my whip not to allow me to travel to the west coast. If the trip to Atlantic coast was anything to like the trip to the Pacific coast, it must have been wonderful. In Shearwater, I especially appreciated the testimony of a woman physician in the Armed Forces, who is now self-employed in the civilian sector.

I will tell you what happens when a soldier leaves the armed forces and contacts Veterans Affairs in order to receive treatment. When a soldier with problems shows up, physicians compete among themselves. They give the file to his wife and ask her to look out for his old friends. It's the same thing in Quebec, Ontario, everywhere. It's as if society and physicians are frightened when a veteran shows up. They try to pass the buck because they don't know what to do. I don't know if we will be getting the summary of the testimony given by this retired female physician in Shearwater; I don't remember her name. But it is worth listening to it again, if we have time. It was enlightening.

Something else that I greatly appreciated happened in Goose Bay, Labrador. A physician we heard from spoke with such openness and honesty that after the meeting, I asked him if he was worried about losing his job or being transferred. He said no, that he had been there for 16 years, that he liked his job and that no one wanted to replace him. He mentioned, like other people whom we heard from, how common post-traumatic stress disorder is in the armed forces. It's the first time I have heard anyone say such a thing, and that's why I asked him if he was very sure of what he wanted to say.

I will ask my usual question: should recruits be better informed about the possibility that they will suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or operational stress injuries? The physician told me that training was given, for example, on sexual assaults. I was greatly surprised and pleased to learn that that was possible.

Each year training is given for a certain number of months on sexual assaults which can occur among members of the armed forces. People receive training on various topics that do not necessarily concern fighting, handling weapons or physical fitness. This is general training. The physician we heard from would really like to add a component on post-traumatic stress disorder to this training program. He admitted that a person suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder further to an operation can be just as dangerous, if not more so for his friends than for him or herself. This person could be piloting a helicopter and could all of a sudden decide to kill everyone on board because he is no longer responsible or less responsible for his actions. For a member of the armed forces, this physician was unbelievably frank and honest.

● (1550)

Something else, that Brent referred to as well, really opened my eyes and caused me to think: a mission lasts a minimum of 15 months. Troops require a certain number of months of training in the United States, western Canada, etc. In addition they must spend between six and nine months in a theatre of operations. So, for these people, an operational mission does not last from six to nine months. It is not six to nine months that they spend far away from their family, but rather 15 months or more. That really made me think.

My trip was wonderful and I am eager to go to Petawawa and Valcartier to pursue my observations. I think that the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs is ready to make some interesting recommendations to the armed forces on training and on what happens with recruits from the time they enrol to the time they become veterans, not from the perspective of what I call military training, but as concerns humanitarian training, violence, and so forth. There are already courses offered on the effects of alcohol and drugs. We could add a component on post-traumatic stress. It was the physician in Goose Bay who thought of this, not me, but I think we should study this idea.

I have a question for my friend Alexandre. I took the liberty, on my own personal behalf, of telling the physician in Shearwater—because he was extremely interested in the psychological aspect of the question—that we would forward him the “blues” of the committee for information purposes, concerning the testimony of Ms. Brillon.

Has this been done?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Alexandre Roger): Yes, I sent him the blues for all the committee meetings on post-traumatic stress disorder. I sent them to him and to another lady whom we met in Shearwater.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: You also sent them to the physician in Shearwater, so you sent them to both physicians.

The Clerk: Yes, the email was sent.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: I want to notify everybody that next we will have Mr. Stoffer, Mr. Sweet, and Mr. Valley, but before we do that, Mr. Perron, I want to make sure I clearly understand one of your points. I'm expecting Mrs. Hinton will say this is more of a military or army or DND matter than it is a Veterans Affairs matter, so I'm offering that as a precursor to her.

Having said that, I'm intrigued by some of the ways they talked about dealing with the stress. You mentioned some forms of harassment or abuse and drinking and drugs.

I remember one time I saw some American soldiers who were involved in Iraq being interviewed by Dennis Miller. They talked about going back after missions and actually engaging in hand-to-hand combat as a way of using organized aggression to work out their own stress.

Is that touching on it in any way? They were dealing with it that way.

● (1555)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: I think training is provided to teach young servicemen and women to behave appropriately in a theatre of operations. For example, if they are posted to a Muslim country, they must not remove a woman's veil or drink alcohol. Training can also be provided on interpersonal behaviour, for example, in a case where a serviceman assaults a servicewoman. This is non-military behavioural training, and it already exists. I think that post-traumatic stress disorder falls into exactly the same category. Therefore, instead of spending two and a half hours in training before deployment, as Dr. Descôteaux from Valcartier told us here, they could spend 25, 30 or 40 hours, because these training programs are offered on a yearly basis.

[English]

The Chair: All right. I think I have a better handle on it.

Now we'll go over to Mr. Stoffer.

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

I have several points.

A few weeks ago I attended a public accounts meeting at which the Auditor General appeared with Major General Semianiw and the Surgeon General of DND. They talked specifically about post-traumatic stress and the fact that 27% of the troops coming back have a mental or physical injury. They indicated that at this time there aren't enough financial and in some cases human resources to deal with the influx. The clerk may want to get copies of those blues and hand them out to the committee, and at a future date the committee may want to invite them in order to ascertain how they're doing, or what they're doing, at the top level to improve in terms of the Auditor General's recommendations.

The other day in Halifax, the CO indicated the book *On Killing*, by Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman. I read the book. It is absolutely fascinating. It's everything we've been talking about—how you would take an ordinary kid out of Medicine Hat or Musquodoboit Harbour or Kamloops and train him to be a killer, and then understanding the psychological aspects. Some of them deal with it very well. Some of them go completely off the rails.

This gentleman is a former lieutenant colonel himself. The book is absolutely fascinating. Mr. Chairman, I'm looking to you for advice; I would recommend making a notice of motion that everyone in this committee should be able to receive one, because it would be....

You can get it at Chapters. It is \$19, and I will guarantee that it will open your eyes as to what happens and the history of it from World War I to Korea and how it went. It reflects a bit upon the Canadian snipers, if you remember, who were doing those shots from two kilometres away when they were working with the United States. Then *Maclean's* did an article on them, and many of them are now out of the service with PTSD. This book explains what happens to people of that nature, and it is very worthwhile to read about it.

The other matter we heard about was that every single person we met said Cyprus was the best thing that happened to them. It's a three-day detoxification—no, they got intoxicated, actually. For those three days they know they're not home yet, but they're out of there. It's like a three-day catch-your-breath period of being able to talk to your buddies and talk to people up in the military. We heard that the military did a fantastic job in addressing their concerns on what they may expect in the future and so on. I don't know if we could ever move a motion to go to Cyprus to actually see that, but I just want to put on the record that it is outstanding. Maybe we can get one of those people who go to Cyprus and instruct the soldiers to come before the committee to let us know exactly how they do that. When someone comes off the Hercules, or whatever the plane is, in Cyprus and they talk to them, what kind of process is it? What forms do they fill out? That would be very helpful.

I have another concern. The other day I met with a U.S. soldier, and the United States is now conducting an inquiry regarding the use of anthrax. As you know, anthrax was the vaccine in the first Gulf War, and how many soldiers...? There is no definitive proof yet, but there is speculation that maybe, just maybe, anthrax may have something to do with some psychological problems that some of the soldiers are experiencing. The United States is undertaking a review of any medical evidence that it may or may not have; it's on the website. I'm not sure if it is something we want to look into. I know a lot of our veterans from the first Gulf War that we speak to here have indicated that maybe it was the inoculations they received that caused some of their problems. We're not quite sure.

My last point is that Betty Hinton was very generous the other day in donating some posters for the decorations here. I'm just seeking clarification, Mr. Chairman: how are we coming along with the dedication of this room in making it a bit more welcoming to veterans, somewhat like room 362 in the East Block, the so-called "war room"?

Thank you.

• (1600)

The Chair: I just asked our clerk about the book *On Killing* by Dave Grossman. He is going to look into the situation. We do have funds, but we don't really know a precedent on that type of thing. With regard to that issue, I'll just be blunt, committee members. Sometimes we are given books around this place, and it's one thing to be given the book. We may, at some point down the road, want to think about having somebody come in to talk about it, because just because you get a book, you don't necessarily have time to read it, right? That's just an idea.

With regard to your comments on Cyprus, we did not have success, as you well know, in going to the final destination, as it were, but Cyprus is kind of a go-between, if you will. I think if you were to make a motion like that, we'd see how the parties felt around the table, and it's just a matter of producing it to the liaison committee. If we're not going into an election, then I think we may get something like that as a go-ahead.

On your issue of the dedication of the room, we have in a sense just let it sit at the side, because for a while we were forced out of these meeting locations because of the procedure and House affairs committee. Now we occasionally get it back; I don't know how regular and consistent that will be, but we often get bumped.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Chairman, the premise is that when other committees or other people come into this room, they will know this is the veterans room. It provides awareness to those members and visitors that they are in a pretty special room.

The Chair: I think we can probably dedicate some time at some point to look at some of the art we want to put up and maybe make a selection. I think that's a noble idea.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: On that topic...

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead on this point, Mr. Perron.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: How can we ensure that this room is recognized as being the Veterans Affairs room by the House? Is there a way to do so, or is this recognition unofficial?

[English]

The Chair: Just so everybody knows, and in response to you, Mr. Perron, the wording has been recognized by the Speaker in the House of Commons. The one way you take it a step beyond, I suppose, is to have a formal plaque such as the war room has in the East Block. That would be the next stage in the process.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Oh, it's already recognized as the vets' room?

The Chair: We already have that recognition, sir, so now it's just a matter of carrying through with some visible, tangible effects of it, rather than just having something in Hansard and being recognized by the Speaker.

Now we'll go on to Mr. Sweet.

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

I don't want to interrupt the flow, because I saw that although we had an agenda, we're actually on a general debriefing about the travel. For my part, I would like to say how much I regret that I was not able to travel, but I'm hoping to in April. Hopefully my responsibilities won't be to the degree that they were on public accounts, so that I'll be able to do that.

We have a list of possible suggested witnesses, and I just wanted to add two names, if I could. One is Lieutenant-General Michel Maisonneuve, who is presently the president of the military college at Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. He had an esteemed career with the military in the armoured division and served in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The other witness we could add, if we're going to call more witnesses, is Commander Sean McKee of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry; he is the commander of that regiment right now, but he has also served in Afghanistan.

• (1605)

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Is he a serving member or a veteran?

Mr. David Sweet: He is serving right now; Lieutenant-Colonel Michel Maisonneuve is retired.

The Chair: The clerk is saying that it is in a sense a motion, and that's fine. In a sense we are adding it.

Is that a motion that we had? Yes.

Tell me if I'm wrong. My reading would be that he is just adding this to the list, when we have yet to determine who we're actually going to decide we're going to hear. Okay, that's fine.

Mr. Sweet, you had Lieutenant-General Maisonneuve, but who was the second one?

Mr. David Sweet: I'll be fine with that, but there's another person who served in Afghanistan and has witnessed a lot, and that's Commander Sean McKee.

The Chair: Thank you, sir. Fair enough.

He served in Afghanistan. I'm mostly making notes for my own edification.

I also wanted to let the committee know, in response to what Mr. Stoffer was asking earlier about the book by Dave Grossman, that if a motion is adopted by the committee, then in a sense it's actionable to go ahead and purchase books for the committee.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Does he have to have 48 hours?

The Chair: If you're on the subject at matter, you can go ahead and make the motion.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Then I make a motion for discussion, obviously, that the committee be authorized to purchase for each member and the researcher and the clerk a copy of the book *On Killing: The Psychological Costs of Learning to Kill*, by Lieutenant-Colonel Dave Grossman of the U.S. Army.

The Chair: Do we have any discussion on the matter?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: That's done.

We've dealt with Mr. Sweet's intervention and now we're over to Mr. Valley.

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

You gave me a phrase earlier: "organized aggression". I've been trying to organize my aggression since I got here today.

I learned a lot, as you can imagine. I wrote a lot of notes. I do that. I'm probably the only guy in the world who can read them, but that's okay. I have no intention of going through them at this point. I think I will pick up the pieces after we get to the other couple of bases and after we see the researcher's document. I learned a lot. It was a very valuable lesson.

I want to clarify. I don't blame anybody in this room for what happened, but I want to explain to you what happened. I understand there are reasons that people couldn't go, and why people weren't there was taken out of our hands and out of this room.

When we arrived in Comox, B.C., we did not even know that the rest of the people weren't going to be there. It was a bit of a surprise to us. That having been said, when we sat in on the first morning and the chairman opened the meeting, I'm guessing there were upwards of 50 people there. There were 12 spots around the table waiting for us. We know now why people couldn't go, but we did not know at the time.

Every one of us has sat in meetings at which you expect a lot of people to be present. There were 50 people there waiting to see us and we weren't there. I'm not blaming anybody, but I'm telling you what we did: we insulted everybody in that room.

It got better as we went along. Each meeting changed, for the reason that they briefed each other. When we arrived in Cold Lake, they knew everything that had been said the day before. It wasn't a repeat session. Every base got better and better, because they had the briefings from the other bases. These people were ready for us.

It was a shame that because of other considerations outside this committee we did not represent Parliament well. They had a lot to tell us. There were a lot of veterans. There were a lot of serving people. The people who presented to us in, I believe, Shearwater or Goose Bay are actually over there right now. They were on their days off. They're given so many days off before they actually ship out; they were on their days off and they came in because they wanted to talk to us and they wanted us to get it right in the future for them.

We saw some extremely emotional testimony. It was very powerful. It's only going to get better when we get to the other two bases, because they'll have all that information there, and I'm going to cut my arm off if I can't go to the next one because of some things that happened outside this room.

What happened to these people was absolutely disgusting. We did the best we could; we know there's nobody to blame in this room. The fact is, these people wanted to talk to us. I could not believe how much they wanted to talk to us, and over and over and over again they told us they are not there about policy. They want to do the job that's given to them. We've seen some who came back under extreme circumstances—wounded, whatever you want—and they believe in doing their job. Policy's not something they wanted to get into.

Again, I'm not blaming anybody in this room, but I was disgusted by what happened to us because of decisions made outside this room. We had a job to do. We questioned whether it was the right job to do; we know now it was, but what happened was still terrible. I don't blame anybody in this room, but those are the facts.

You all know, as I said, how embarrassing it is when you go into a room expecting some people to be there and they don't show up. Let's get it better the next time, and hopefully....

Again, these decisions are outside our hands, but what happened was terrible. I told you that at the time. I tried to control myself during the meetings as much as I could, because I knew I couldn't blame the people in this room. It still happened, and I'm sure you sensed it as we sat there.

The first morning he started with two of us. Brent was about an hour late. We did the best we could and we gathered up lots of information, but we insulted those people in those rooms through no fault of our own.

• (1610)

The Chair: I think you've prompted Mr. Sweet to intervene.

Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet: I wasn't really following Mr. Valley. He clarified that there were two people. I thought there was a meeting at which none of us actually showed up. I hadn't heard about that. There were low numbers. There were two, and then Mr. St. Denis showed up. So that's fine. I just needed to clarify that.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Did you have government and official opposition?

Mr. Roger Valley: We had the chairman, me, and Mr. Stoffer for the first morning. Brent joined us an hour late, maybe.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: So you had government, official opposition, and another member of the opposition. I can understand what you're saying, but at least there was representation.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: There was for those two days.

The Chair: I think one of the great ironies of this is that we fought—I fought—to make sure we had the whole committee travel. As it turns out, we did have about half and half. It's the great irony of it all.

Anyhow, that kind of extinguishes—unless anybody else has something to add as a debrief with regard to this issue—the base visitations.

Michel, you can kind of take that into account with regard to what we're doing. I sense there are some committee members who would like to have the notes or whatever with regard to Melissa and what she did. Fair enough.

I'm just organizing in my mind how we're going to proceed with the rest of it.

Mr. Valley, go ahead.

Mr. Roger Valley: After the last two bases, you're going to give us time to talk around this table—

The Chair: Absolutely. I would expect so.

Mr. Roger Valley: —just so we can put up some of the points we think we've gathered up?

The Chair: That would be my intention, absolutely.

Mr. Roger Valley: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Just to clarify, we do have a draft report. These things are being added to the draft report. The situation we have with regard to Petawawa and Valcartier is still pending, and that's all part of the same report.

I realize there's a desire by members here to proceed with the report per se, but we don't want to close the report. We could present an interim report, if you wanted to, to the House of Commons. But we still want to, in a sense, probably keep it open so that we can go and visit Petawawa and Valcartier.

Mr. Perron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Have you scheduled any dates for the trips to Petawawa and Valcartier? If so, I want to emphasize that we should wait to visit these bases before drafting the report.

[English]

The Chair: I think that's wise, sir. Just to let you know, the two dates that I have before me right now are April 8 and April 15. April 8, of course, is for the one to Valcartier, and April 15 is for the one to Petawawa. The clerk informs me that to do that we have to pass these budgets adopted in committee.

I have a question for the clerk. Didn't we get budgets for these already?

• (1615)

The Clerk: The dates were pushed back.

The Chair: I have to go back to the liaison committee because of the dates.

Do we want to have discussion of the motions? Does somebody need to move those first? Can I move those?

The Clerk: You can move them.

The Chair: I move them.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: This is something about when we get to Petawawa. It's just a point of clarification.

The Chair: Mr. Stoffer, we are on the subject now. So do you want to—

Mr. Peter Stoffer: There's just one thing. As you know, Petawawa made the news last year, so when we went there....

I want to be very sensitive here. The women and children of the men who were killed overseas—remember that story about them not getting the help and stuff? I don't know if the women would be up to a committee meeting or not. I'm trying to be sensitive about this. If they won't, then that's the end of it. That's the story.

I don't know what the committee thinks about talking to them to find out what their experiences have been, a year later.

The Chair: My automatic knee-jerk reaction to that, Mr. Stoffer, would be that we obviously want to be available for them if they want to meet with us, but given what they've gone through, I'm not sure you want to go banging down their doors.

We will be there, and maybe the clerk can make some very diplomatic....

Mr. Peter Stoffer: To get the committee's hands on it....

The Chair: Yes. I don't think we want to be banging down the door, sir.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Exactly.

The Chair: The clerk has raised a question about whether or not it will technically be a committee meeting or whether people will just be meeting with us. What we've had up until now really is just having people meeting with us. I think actually that's a better way to go; it's less formal, and there are no transcripts and we're left to our own devices with regard to notes. But I think people feel less intimidated; it's not in Hansard or recorded, as there are no blues. I think it's a lot more free-flowing.

I think you get better information that way, Mr. Stoffer.

Anyhow, that's just for clarification.

Mr. Valley, on the subject of motions.

Mr. Roger Valley: Yes, just before we go, I apologize for getting on my soapbox and getting a little tippy there.

We talked about needing somebody from Defence to come to explain the first part that Mr. Stoffer talked about, the briefing, because this is not clear even to a lot of the people we talked to. You go if you were in-theatre for 67 days, but not if you were there for 60 days. We know there's a rationale because of what you explained, but we had asked for somebody from Defence to come to explain to us, at one of our meetings, how all of that is arrived at. We know that if you're cycled in for a two-week period because someone is sick, you may not go, but we don't understand why people who are in-theatre for 60 days aren't going. So we had asked for somebody from the defence department to come in to explain that to us.

The Chair: Okay. That's an interesting subject.

I sense Michel has something to add, but I also wonder how relevant it is to the motions we're dealing with.

Mr. Roger Valley: I should have added this point before.

You were all glaring at me!

The Chair: Whoa, horsey.

I don't sense we have anything more on the issue of travelling to Petawawa and Valcartier. Why don't we put that to bed, and then I'm going to let Michel respond. How does that sound?

All those in favour of going to Valcartier, for an amount of \$30,736?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next one is really cheap. Imagine this: it only costs \$1,948 for the committee to travel to Petawawa. That's a steal. All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Good, those are put to bed.

Now, on the subject Mr. Valley just raised, the 67 days, etc., Michel.

• (1620)

Mr. Michel Rossignol (Committee Researcher): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to mention that for questions seeking clarification on the number of days, and other issues of DND policy, we will probably have the same witnesses as those who appeared before the public accounts committee recently; the chief of military personnel and the surgeon general, or their representatives, will probably be the persons.

Mr. Roger Valley: That's good enough.

The Chair: I have a follow-up question for Michel.

Because one of the subjects we potentially have to deal with here is the budgetary estimates, if we have examinations of the budgetary estimates, are those also the people who would come here?

Mr. Michel Rossignol: No, they would be from Veterans Affairs.

The Chair: I tried to kill two birds with one stone, but, okay, fair enough, we have clarification on that.

So we've dealt with those two motions. That's good. We've dealt with Mr. Stoffer's motion. That's good.

Now, until that time—which is going to be coming up in April—as we all know, it's going to be a fascinating situation in the House with regard to budget votes, and all of that fun, so in the meantime, we're not wrapping up the report because we still have the two base visits. We've added some more for Michel here as grist for the mill, if you will.

One of the things that we should probably, at some point, take a stab at, because we haven't yet done this as a committee, is the parliamentary or budgetary estimates. That way you could see where all the money is and ask questions about it, and poke and prod. I'm sure Mr. Stoffer will have things to say about where he wants money spent, and he can look at where he wants to take money from, and all sorts of good issues. So I think it would probably be a good idea if we had some people in for the estimates, and we can go through those. That way, the clerk can set these things up.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: You guys support the “veterans first” motion and we'll be all right.

The Chair: Maybe that's the next place we'll go.

Mr. Stoffer, could I ask you to prepare a motion with regard to Cyprus?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Okay. I'll have it for the next meeting.

The Chair: All right. Depending on how it goes, we may deal with it, and if we do get witnesses with regard to budgetary estimates, which I—

The Clerk: On Tuesday? We already have someone for Tuesday.

The Chair: Oh, scratch that. So on Thursday, or whenever it is....

Just bring it forward and we'll deal with it at the meeting, or something like that.

We have somebody set up for Tuesday. Hopefully, we can get some of the people with regard to the budgetary estimates. Then, after that point, I think some people in the Legion had raised some issues with regard to frailty and what the cut-offs are for whether a veteran is frail or not frail, and so on, funding formulas, all that type of good stuff.

Then we also still have this issue to deal with in terms of some of the other witnesses. I'm just going to read down the list, if you don't mind.

So Sergeant Max Peddle, the speaker who gave....

Mr. Gaudet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): I would like to know, Mr. Chair, whether the funding for these two trips, that is, Petawawa

and Valcartier, will come from the budget that is tabled on March 31 or from the 2008-2009 budget.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm going to let the clerk answer that question.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: The reason why we have to go to the Liaison Committee on this is because it is part of a new fiscal year. That means that the funding will come out of the 2008-2009 budget.

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Thank you. That answers my question.

[*English*]

The Chair: There you go. Because it's in April, that should go first. See, it's just like parliamentary budgets, just like our offices.

Going back to these, I'm just going to read these off: Sergeant Max Peddle, the speaker who gave a brief to the committee in Goose Bay, submitted by Monsieur Perron; Colleen Calvert, the executive director of the Halifax and region military family resource centre, submitted by the Liberal Party; and Mr. Dave Grossman, who is the....

Well, in a sense you're not asking for him to come. We could invite him, but we can't subpoena him.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I wouldn't force the guy. It's just that the book —

The Chair: We can't anyhow, even if you wanted to.

Oh, the clerk has said he'd actually be interested in potentially appearing, so it's a possibility.

Then, of course, we have Lieutenant-General Maisonneuve and Sean McKee.

Is there a military designation or title for Mr. McKee?

• (1625)

Mr. David Sweet: Sean McKee is the commander of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry reserve unit. Once he took command, the first six months were in Afghanistan.

The Chair: These are all with regard to the health care review, obviously?

Mr. David Sweet: Yes.

The Chair: Fair enough.

Then we have the witness on the issue of the 67 days. Do you fellows have an idea of who that would be?

Mr. Michel Rossignol: That would be the chief of military personnel and the surgeon general.

The Chair: The surgeon general. Can I just put that down and you'll know what to do?

Then, of course, we have the budgetary estimates.

Why don't we allow our clerk to go ahead and phone through this list of witnesses?

Mrs. Hinton.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I have a question, because I haven't met this gentleman. Is Sergeant Max Peddle currently serving or is he a veteran?

Mr. Roger Valley: He retired after 25 years, I believe, with 16 years in the reserves, or something like that.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: So he's a veteran or he's serving?

Mr. Roger Valley: Well, he's in the reserves right now.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Okay, so he's a current serving member. So is this one of the people we should be referring to the defence committee? We're muddying up that line again.

I'm one of the original members of this committee, as are Mr. Perron and Mr. Stoffer. Without sounding too difficult, I hope, we fought long and hard to have the veterans affairs committee as a stand-alone committee. Every time we mix defence and veterans affairs, we undermine what we spent years achieving.

So if this gentleman has something valuable to contribute and he's a serving member, I think it goes back to what I said earlier in the meeting. Perhaps this is a man we should recommend that the defence committee speak to, because we're doing that muddy line thing again.

The other comment I want to make is in regard to this Lieutenant-Colonel Dave Grossman. My understanding from what's written in front of me is that he is a member of the U.S. Army, which has nothing to do with Canada. So I'm wondering why we're mixing up U.S. politics, U.S. military with Canadian military.

The Chair: All right, it's a debate over witnesses, then.

Just to let everybody know, it's Mr. Stoffer next, then Mr. Russell, Mr. St. Denis, and Mr. Valley on deck, and I have Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Madam Hinton makes a valid point as to why we would consider retired Lieutenant-Colonel Dave Grossman. The reality is that was suggested to us by the Shearwater crew. The CO very highly recommended that we read the book and talk to him. He went on at length about the book and what it does and what it meant, what happens to soldiers when they become veterans, and the training process of how they become, as he says, "killers", unfortunately, or "people willing to be able to kill", and then the psychological problems after that. It was in line with our PTSD study. The CO and other people at the Shearwater base were very strong in their proposal that we at least read the book and maybe talk to him. That's why we put it here.

On the other issue, though, on witnesses, I'm not sure if you wanted...not to bring them forward, but to pull up the minutes of the public accounts meeting when the Auditor General and the Surgeon General from DND appeared, so the committee could have those things to help us in our further deliberations. I don't think we necessarily have to bring them as witnesses, because Betty's right, that sort of crosses that DND line a bit. But getting the documents would be helpful for the committee members in their deliberations.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I have just one further comment, since you're indulging me today. I recognize that you listened to a presentation, you've read this book, and you've been very moved by it, and I recognize what the title of his book is as well. But you made

reference, when you were speaking earlier, to training "killers". I take great exception to that. We are training "soldiers", not "killers".

Mr. Peter Stoffer: The book indicates you take young men, young women, out of normal circumstances and they become killers. It says it in the book.

• (1630)

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Yes, in the U.S. Army.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I'm just referring to that, that's all.

The Chair: It's Mr. Russell's turn.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Certainly, I want to thank the committee for coming to 5 Wing Goose Bay. It's called Happy Valley-Goose Bay, the official title, close to Sheshatshiu and North West River, and it was a very valuable session. Certainly, I've lived in that community now for over 12 years, and it's great that you always learn something in those particular settings. The witnesses were candid; they were honest. There was a lot of emotion in that particular room.

One of the witnesses who came before us at that particular time was Max Peddle. Max Peddle has served in the regular forces and now in the reserves, but Max Peddle is probably one of the few guys in this particular setting who contributes so much to the care of veterans. He's involved in every aspect of their lives. He understands what veterans go through in remote settings, in remote postings. He has a unique perspective on the issue of veterans services in the provinces in general, not only in Labrador, and I think he would be a valuable witness to hear—not just for those who were in Goose Bay, but for all of this committee. That is why I thank Mr. Perron for suggesting that he appear before us.

He also shared a very emotional story about what happened to a particular veteran in our particular area, so he has something to add to this particular debate. He has something to add because we've talked around the edges of what happens to veterans in rural settings, in remote settings. What he has to contribute to this committee is valuable and he needs to be here. So I would recommend that there be no debate.

When you say, well, we're blurring the lines, just because someone serves in the military doesn't mean they have something valuable to add; therefore, they should be referred to the defence committee. For instance, we have many health professionals who have appeared before us, but we don't necessarily refer them to the health committee or some other committee. There are people in various professions who have something to add to this particular study on veterans health care.

While I appreciate the comments of Ms. Hinton, I don't believe this in any way takes away from the independence of the veterans affairs committee; it adds to the study that we're undertaking. Indeed, it adds to our own independence to call who we wish to call to further our particular work.

I would just add that Max would be a great asset to the work we're undertaking.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Russell.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Can I add a comment?

The Chair: You may do so when it's your turn. Hold on one second.

Mr. St. Denis.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Not only would Max Peddle be an excellent witness in his own right, but he's also going to be in Ottawa. That was one of the key points. So we could take advantage of his experience, and the timing will be quite propitious.

The Chair: Just for the edification of committee members, I believe he's in Ottawa now. We could have had him as a witness, but we hadn't approved it. That's the purpose of this meeting, in a sense.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Then there would have been no cost.

The Chair: I know. Timing is everything.

He's here right now, so we would have to re-invite him.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: With respect to witnesses like Lieutenant-Colonel Dave Grossman, there appear to be things that are DND from one perspective and Veterans Affairs from another. There is this grey zone, transition zone, or elements of the piece that, depending on whether the person is in active service or retired, are either DND or Veterans Affairs. I think we make a mistake by drawing a black-and-white division between what's DND and what's not.

If there is a veterans perspective on an issue that appears to be DND on the face of it but we can see—for example, with Mr. Grossman—that learning to kill affects you later when you're a veteran... That was the whole point of the intervention at the Shearwater meeting. It was an excellent meeting, Peter, thank you. Rather than having that silo prevent us from understanding something happening to a future veteran—a current military person—let's consider anything reasonable that has the potential to be a veterans issue. Then we can sort it out later. If we make a DND recommendation and feel strongly about it, we'll send it to the DND chairman and say, “Look, we've come up with this. Would your committee consider such and such? Or maybe a joint meeting with the DND committee would be appropriate.” Rather than let silos separate us, let's look at these as an opportunity.

For example, I don't know if it makes sense to have this person appear again, but she was certainly a compelling witness at the Shearwater meeting. Dr. McKinnon, who is with the Royal United Services Institute, was a military doctor and is now retired. She specializes in veterans. She recommends that there be a medical transition service. It's debatable what that would entail, but when a military person leaves the military, they're really lost in finding a doctor who understands what they went through, if there are any issues more than just normal health issues. She gets all kinds of referrals from other doctors who don't know what to do with these new veterans because their mental or physical conditions aren't in the normal range of things.

I would argue that if there's any association with a veteran's concern, even if it's in the active military, we shouldn't dismiss it out of hand.

•(1635)

The Chair: Okay.

Now we'll go to Mr. Valley.

Mr. Roger Valley: Thank you.

One thing that was made very plain to us is that the serving men and women have been trained not to speak to us to any great degree. They deal with issues inside the military, and they were surprised and almost shocked that we were doing this. They couldn't believe it. They were very open and candid about it because every one of them, even if they're 20 years old, can be ours after one accident. Once they can't provide a certain level of duty, if they're injured for a year, they're out; they're ours. These people wanted to make sure they had the chance, and that's why they're eager to see us.

To Betty's point, they want to talk to us because it's not about the military. They're not going to complain about Defence or anything else. They want to talk to us about what it's going to be like for them when they're veterans, whether it's unfortunately a year away or a number of years away.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I'm not worried about complaints.

Mr. Roger Valley: I'm just saying that's why they want to talk to us. They were surprised. They've never had the opportunity before to come to a committee and talk about what their future will look like with their pensions, how they're treated, and if they'll have doctors or not. It was quite compelling when they said, “This is a unique opportunity for us. We've never had this chance before.” For that reason we have to consider everyone.

I may be corrected by Gilles because he'll probably be speaking next, but I believe Sergeant Max Peddle served for 28 years, retired, and went back to the reserves because he could not afford to live. He had to do something, and he decided he'd sooner do something in a uniform. That's why he has served for more than 17 years now in the reserves. He believes in it, he wanted to work, and that was the only thing he could do. He could not live on his pension. That's one of the reasons why he's back working.

The Chair: Okay.

Now we go to Mr. Shipley, who's been waiting patiently and quietly, bless his heart.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Thank God for another half hour.

I don't disagree with what's been said, and I would never take away the credibility of the people you saw and talked to. I have a concern about how we're going to determine someone who is in the forces and someone who's a veteran when we get into the discussions of our responsibility. It's not that it isn't good.

I've been listening to Brent, and when he mentioned...I think it was Dr. McKinnon, that's who I think the witness should be. That witness would have the exposure to the persons who are in the transition. That's what we're trying to learn about.

Actually, I just talked to David about the witnesses he had asked for. Again, I've nothing against wanting to have credible witnesses, whether they're serving as active members or are veterans. My concern is that if we're going to start talking about witnesses in the transition, then we need to be talking to the doctors, the people who are in Defence and in Veterans Affairs, to talk about those professional people who are involved. They're the ones who talk not to one person but to all the people or a number of the people who will be having trouble.

Many will come to us not without having had an issue. Many of them will have had some sort of contact with someone, either in Defence or in Veterans Affairs, once they cross over that line.

Back in the fall there were those talking about that transition, about the active person coming into being a veteran and the amount of work and the amount of correspondence, the amount of information they were trying to get to someone in the armed forces before they became a vet. It would seem to me that's where we need to be starting.

I am concerned that if we start opening it up to individuals who will come in without having had departmental...or having the experts and those people who are involved in the medical field... I think those who are talking to them in the transition, dealing with them in the transition, are the ones who should be coming here first.

• (1640)

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Shipley.

Now, just to let everybody know, next will be Monsieur Perron and then Mrs. Hinton, who's temporarily gone.

At this point, since Mr. St. Denis and Mr. Shipley have mentioned Dr. Heather McKinnon—I believe the name is—I've tossed her name onto the list.

Just so everybody knows, the list is as follows: Sergeant Max Peddle, Colleen Calvert, Lieutenant-Colonel Dave Grossman, Lieutenant-General Maisonneuve, Commander Sean McKee, the Surgeon General people—with regard to the budgetary estimates—and now Dr. Heather McKinnon.

Those are the budget estimate witnesses, right? They're the same thing? Yes. We have it written down differently. We both say budget.

Monsieur Perron, you're on deck.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: I'd like to come back to Max Peddle. We have to consider what life is like for a war veteran living in the boondocks, in other words, a very remote area where there are practically no services. Évain, the small village in Abitibi where I was born, is a good example. We need to think about how an individual of 75, 78 or 80 years can be uprooted from a place where they spent their entire life, and be sent to hospital in a major urban centre.

I have to tell you something: I broke down in Goose Bay because my father chose suicide over moving to a big city. I apologize, but this is very emotional for me.

Another point: Max Peddle works with aboriginals. He wanted to bring an aboriginal man out of his home area where he would go fishing, and so on. He wanted to save him, but the man refused to move to Halifax. He let himself die by not taking his medication, among other things. That is experience. What is being done for the aboriginal war veterans who live on the shores of James Bay or Hudson Bay? What is being done to assist aboriginals living in your territory, Mr. Valley? Mr. Valley's riding is home to several aboriginal reserves. What services are provided? By listening to Max Peddle we will be able to get an idea of what is being done, what is not being done, what can or cannot be improved, etc. I know that this involves costs but I am committed to having Max Peddle come before us because I know his personal experience will leave an impression on you.

Furthermore, my friend Claude Bachand, who is the Bloc Québécois representative on the National Defence Committee, told me today that next week that committee will begin a study on post-traumatic stress syndrome. Isn't it time that our committee chair spoke to the national defence committee chair to tell him that we've been discussing post-traumatic stress syndrome for more than two years?

• (1645)

[*English*]

The Chair: He sits in the chair right next to me in the House of Commons, and we talk about it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: I know Rick. They would certainly have something to learn from our experience. We could send them testimony, for example.

[*English*]

The Chair: The clerk has a suggestion. The clerk talked about having a committee meeting jointly between National Defence and Veterans Affairs. You know what? That's a lot of cats to herd, and that kind of defeats the purpose.

I can tell Mrs. Hinton is not impressed. We're just nixing that idea.

In response to something Monsieur Perron said, the aboriginal veterans group is coming on March 13; we'll have them testifying here.

We'll go now to Mrs. Hinton, and I hope that's the last person.

Mr. Perron, are you done?

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Yes, I'm over it.

The Chair: Yes, I sensed that. The microphone went silent, so I assumed that.

Now we'll go to Mrs. Hinton. I'm hoping, then, that at that stage we can make some decisions on this.

Go ahead, Mrs. Hinton.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I've listened very carefully, and I'm rather convinced now that this Sergeant Peddle has something to offer. My only concern is the one I raised earlier, which is that I don't want to muddy that line and have someone decide there's no need to have two separate committees and that they can go back to the way they were, which is for Veterans Affairs to be the poor orphan of the defence committee.

I suppose I could be satisfied to know that Sergeant Max Peddle is going to limit his testimony to veterans issues, and that would cover the problem.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: He is the president of the Canadian Legion, by the way.

[*English*]

The Chair: I sense there's consensus.

Mr. Sweet says he's going to be short and sweet.

Mr. David Sweet: That's right, in the spirit of unity and unanimity, and all of that other stuff, if the defence committee is going to be doing a study on post-traumatic stress disorder, then why don't you remove the one witness I suggested, Commander Sean McKee, and leave him for the defence committee, as he's active? Lieutenant-General Michel Maisonneuve, a retired three-star general, would be good to have before our committee.

The Chair: Okay, since you suggested those witnesses, you're allowed to withdraw them, in my humble opinion.

So the list is as it stands—and I sense we have agreement from Mrs. Hinton on this—

Mrs. Betty Hinton: He might think so, yes.

The Chair: Well, first off, I'm going to let you know how I was going to do this. For the ones whom nobody complained about, we would just have said they were good, and for the ones on whom there was disagreement, we might have had to vote.

Anyway, I sense that having Mr. Peddle is okay with everybody. Now that we've all talked it out, I sense that's all right.

Nobody even mentioned Colleen Calvert, so I think we're probably okay with having her here.

With regard to Lieutenant-General Michel Maisonneuve, I sense everybody is okay with having him.

We're skipping Commander Sean McKee.

We are going to go with the Surgeon General. I think everybody is okay with that.

And for the people with regard to the budgetary estimates, I think everybody is okay with them.

I sense people are okay with having Dr. Heather McKinnon here.

Now let's move back to the subject of the American Lieutenant-Colonel, Dave Grossman. I sense there was some disagreement over having him here. Do people want the clerk to ask him whether or not he's willing to come?

An hon. member: Yes.

An hon. member: No.

The Chair: Maybe we need to take a vote on that. We've already had a lot of discussion.

All those in favour of an invitation being extended to Lieutenant-Colonel Dave Grossman?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Mr. Shipley, did you have something to add?

• (1650)

Mr. Bev Shipley: No, it was about something before.

But I'm wondering why we're having a U.S. Lieutenant-Colonel come here, who is under different politics or circumstances. It might be interesting, actually, but if we're going have other countries coming in to talk to us, we may actually want to compare our programs in Canada for veterans with those in other G-7 countries, for example, to see how we actually are doing with our veterans in comparison with others.

If we're going to have somebody in from the States to talk about their veterans, why are we not having somebody in from England to talk about their veterans, or Australia, or—

The Chair: Okay. I'm going to ask Mr. Shipley, because I don't think the committee would be opposed to having people in from England or Australia and/or.... At one point, we all remember, way, way, back when, we were even willing to do a trip to Australia. Remember that? Remember those good old days?

Mr. Bev Shipley: That was for the ombudsman.

The Chair: Yes, that's right, it was for the ombudsman. There you go. That was a while ago.

That being said, Mr. Shipley, maybe if you have some witnesses you think would be worthwhile bringing forward from England or Australia or—

Mr. Bev Shipley: No, I don't.

I'm just saying that if we're going to look at it and be talking about the programs they may have—why would he be coming if he wasn't going to—and we are talking about having somebody in from another country on the ombudsman, what were we looking at? We were looking at comparing an ombudsman in this country versus the benefits of what other ombudsmen have had in other similar countries.

What I'm suggesting is that if we're going to have somebody come in from the States to talk about their issues with their veterans, then we should be talking to other countries about their programs for their veterans. This is what I see in regard to Mr. Grossman; I'd have absolutely no concern having him come in for that. I think this might be something we should consider. If we're going to build on our program, maybe we should look at the United States, England, France, Italy, and the sorts of programs they actually supply for their veterans. I think that's where Mr. Grossman would be an excellent candidate, likely.

But I just don't see having this witness alone coming in to talk about their veterans, outside of our Canadian ones.

The Chair: I take your point, Mr. Shipley, and yet, because we have a vote—

Mr. Bev Shipley: We've already had it. I'm just making my point, because I think it's wrong.

The Chair: It happens sometimes around here.

Now we'll go to Mr. Stoffer, and Mr. Perron is on deck.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I've been advised by the clerk that I need to serve a verbal notice of motion for the trip to Cyprus.

The Chair: You're giving us a heads-up. Heads-up given and noted.

Monsieur Perron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: I won't speak, I simply wanted to respond to Bev, but given that we have already voted on it, nothing will change.

From what I understood, Mr. Grossman is not a government employee but simply a former member of the military. He's also the author of a book. He has no relationship with the American military system or with war veterans, if I correctly understood what the Shearwater people told us.

•(1655)

[*English*]

The Chair: I thought we were getting close to done.

Mr. St. Denis.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Are we at future business? Could I mention future business?

The Chair: Yes, I think this is future business.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: There was a list we made at one point in time of the various suggestions by members, not ranked by any order of merit or alphabetically, only ranked by, I think, their arrival time. I think Alex still has that list. I would ask that at any time we have a meeting where future business is planned, we just be given a copy of that list in its current state to act as a prompt and reminder of those things, sort of like a running inventory of members' ideas on future business, so that I can be reminded of what David brought up maybe six months ago. Maybe six months ago I thought one way about it and maybe now I think differently. So if that's not asking too much of the clerk, I would like to see that.

The Chair: If the clerk has it, he can probably generate it for you. My sense of where we're at is that we're continuing our veterans health care review. This budgetary estimates issue is going to kind of intercede, and then we need to take these couple of trips and finish that up. Then we'll go on to something new, in a sense.

That's my sense. I know where you're coming from.

Mr. Brent St. Denis: Future is future, whether it's the next two months or two years. We won't always be in minorities, hopefully. We hope to do something about it.

So it's just as a prompt. As one of my colleagues said, we're getting older and we don't always remember the things that were on these lists. You're a young guy, but it's to help us older members.

The Chair: I'm getting older by the day, sir.

Now I'm going to Mr. Cannan.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was sitting here and listening with great interest, and I think some really good insight, and I too regret that I was unable to go on the trip.

Specifically to the witnesses, I met with a lady who lives in the Okanagan who works for Veterans Affairs as an occupational therapist, and she has some really good insight. Her husband is a member of the military, and she has been working in the whole military field for several years. I'd like to echo that she might one day become a witness at the defence committee or here.

But I'd like to reinforce my colleague Mr. Shipley's idea about looking at our standing compared to others in the G-7, in terms of respect for veterans and how they're being treated. I think it's a good work project for this committee. Maybe we can all take a look to see where we can learn from others. If we're bringing in other people, we've brought in expertise from Canada, and we can look to others from other countries and learn from each other. We don't have to reinvent the wheel but just pick up the pieces where we are, and it's good to use that as a benchmark as well.

We don't have a steering committee here. I believe we just have the committee of the whole.

The Chair: Sir, that's just extra meetings, and nobody wants those.

Mr. Ron Cannan: So for us as a committee, I'd like to put that down. I don't know if you need a formal motion or if I have consensus, but I'd like to see that as part of our work plan.

The Chair: It is part of the mix here, for sure, Mr. Cannan. Maybe if there are witnesses you would like to have generated, you can generate some witnesses.

The other potentiality is that we have Mr. Stoffer bringing forward a motion with regard to visiting Cyprus. Maybe you'd want to bring forward a motion with regard to visiting Australia to see how they treat their veterans. Who knows?

Mrs. Betty Hinton: This country treats its veterans better than any other.

The Chair: Very, very well, that's right—and its members of the veterans affairs committee.

At that stage, we're not that far away from....

An hon. member: The meeting is adjourned.

The Chair: Okay, there we go. The meeting is adjourned.

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