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## Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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EVIDENCE

**Thursday, March 13, 2008**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Rob Anders**

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•(1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC)):** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. We're starting a few minutes late because we wanted to make sure we had enough for full quorum, and because of the delay in the votes in the House of Commons.

Today we have witnesses with us from the National Aboriginal Veterans Association. I had a chance to meet you gentlemen on the way in. Alastair MacPhee is the policy adviser, and Claude Petit is the president.

As for the way it generally works, you have 20 minutes. You can share that time however you see fit. You can take 10 minutes each, or if you want 20 minutes for one and zero for the other, that's your prerogative.

Then we'll go to our predetermined list of partisan questions, in a sense. We all have that laid out. There will be two different rounds. We'll start sounding off, and I'll introduce them as they come.

The floor is yours.

**Mr. Claude Petit (President, National Aboriginal Veterans Association):** Good afternoon, Rob and members of the standing committee. Thank you for inviting us to make our presentation to your committee.

I'm going to give you some background on the National Aboriginal Veterans Association.

This organization wasn't formed by aboriginal veterans themselves; it was formed by government. At that time, Ron Irwin called me at home and asked if it was a good idea to have all the aboriginal veterans under one umbrella. I figured it was a good idea, so we went ahead and brought all the aboriginal groups into Ottawa and formed this organization. Before that, there was the National Indian Veterans Association, so we changed the name. We spent a week here changing the name to the National Aboriginal Veterans Association.

Also, we were incorporated at the national level, so we're incorporated federally, and we do get funding. So the first nations, Métis, non-status, and Inuit come under our umbrella. But as you're probably aware, they start breaking off. They are having their own organizations. It's pretty hard to keep them together.

Anyway, we do get funding from the federal interlocutor, very little funding, to have our AGM meeting and also a bit of administration. We have a newsletter—I didn't bring any copies

along, but I should have—that I try to send out to people in Parliament on what we're doing.

We're also involved with the other aboriginal groups, such as the Legion, the Korea Veterans Association, and Betterness and Equalness for Veterans, which is an organization from Saskatoon that was formed to help veterans. Also, the Korea veterans do a lot of work for the veterans who are disabled, right across Canada.

We also constructed a monument. When we started this organization, we had three things in mind: a scholarship fund; the monument, which is in the park across from the Lord Elgin Hotel, in Confederation Park; and.... We'll be talking about this later on. Mr. MacPhee will be explaining some of the budgets.

We sent in a budget to finish that monument off. There's a photo that will go around. Take a look at the way it's supposed to be finished, and it's not. What we're asking for is to get it finished. Now it runs over \$200,000 to get the plates on. Those plates on that monument are scenes of the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War, and peacekeeping, which make the four corners.

We did get some money from the interlocutor to finish the lighting. If you go there at night, you'll see it's a nice monument. It's lit up. So we did get that done, but we're still asking for money to finish the monument.

My part of the job, after we got organized, was the monument, and that's what I did. I went around and raised funds for the monument. I think I wrote about 500 or 600 letters to different organizations. We got it finished through Heritage Canada to where it's at now.

But the other big thing is the scholarship fund. That was supposed to be under our control, but our name is not even mentioned now. I met the girl who's in charge of it now. I forget her name, but I met her in Victoria at a meeting and told her about this. We're not even mentioned, and it was our fund.

• (1540)

If you look back, there was \$1 million given to start that fund. The mechanics of it were supposed to be that the interest on that money was to pay for the scholarships. Mind you, now it's the achievement foundation. It's a good fund. I'm not knocking it, because it's doing a lot for the aboriginal students. But it was supposed to be under our control—that's the problem—and it was supposed to be for aboriginal veterans, students, and their kids, running down the list. But it didn't happen. We're not even mentioned in it, so we lost that.

We're looking at maybe starting a new scholarship fund, but I know what it takes. I did the monument, and it took me two years to get it to where it is. There's a lot of work, especially if you don't have the funds and everything else that goes along with them.

So that's where we are right now with the scholarship fund.

The other thing is the contributions to the first nations or aboriginal veterans. They were given \$20,000 last year or the year before, or \$39 million all told for 1,800 veterans. If you recall, the aboriginal people are entrenched in the Constitution. We're still aboriginal people and we were left out. It's like everything else.

We have submissions in to government to get funding the same as the Hong Kong veterans and the merchant navy. That's fair. That's why I'm saying that: it's fair. If you didn't serve overseas, you didn't get the money; it was \$15,000 for serving overseas, if you were in action, and \$7,000 if you were here in Canada serving and ready to go. I think that's fair; for us, that was fair.

We never even got that. The Chinese and Japanese got the \$20,000 also. The first nations people got the \$20,000, and they had to jump through hoops to get it. They had to come from overseas directly into the reservation in order to get it.

I know that because there was a guy from northern Ontario who was married and had two kids, and he didn't qualify because he didn't go directly to the reserve after coming back from overseas—he was a Second World War guy. He phoned me right away, and I asked what was wrong. He told me he couldn't go, because he had kids. They didn't have any housing in the reserve, so he couldn't go. He stayed in Thunder Bay, and they refused him. That's the type of thing that was happening.

Why aren't we involved in this type of decision-making for veterans? I'm a veteran, and I don't like.... I just had a meeting here last week in town with the ombudsman. At least we have an ombudsman now to do some work for us, to speak to the DVA and to try to get our programs through—including for me; I had a hard time with the DVA. It's the system. It's changing now, but there's still a lot of work to be done so that people are treated equally.

That's not saying aboriginal veterans only. There are the other veterans also. I sit on some committees; I was president of the Korea veterans in Saskatoon and I know what's happening with some of our veterans, Second World War guys.

• (1545)

Anyway, they received \$39 million for their veterans, just the first nations veterans. I would like to see some compensation for all aboriginal veterans. If just first nations veterans are going to receive

it, that's discrimination, because we're entrenched in the Constitution. We're called aboriginal people—Métis, non-status, and Inuit. The government looks at us as aboriginal people. They gave \$39 million to the first nations people. Why? Why weren't we included in that?

There's a lot more I could add, but I haven't got too much time.

Anyway, we have 20 recommendations. The Senate did a survey, right across Canada, and made some recommendations. I think there were 12 recommendations. We have 20.

You have those recommendations in your package, which was revised by us. Alastair will speak to that.

Also, the information came from the provinces. Maybe I didn't go far enough into that. We have people in every province—except one province in the Maritimes, either because the veterans don't want to join or we don't have that many aboriginal veterans there—and every territory, and they all had some input into these recommendations that Alastair is going to speak about.

That's all I have to say right now, unless you have any questions on what I've said.

**The Chair:** I'll just let you know, sir, about the way this will probably work. If your colleague has something to say, then we'll let him have his time. Then we'll open it up to questions. If we had questions now, that would possibly interfere with his time. I think it's easier if both of you have the chance to present before we go to questions.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Okay. Thank you.

**Mr. Alastair MacPhee (Policy Advisor, National Aboriginal Veterans Association):** Good afternoon, Chairman Anders and committee members.

I would like to thank you for inviting NAVA to be here today. I am honoured to be here beside Claude Petit, a Métis veteran, who at 16 years of age was in combat in Korea as a member of the Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry. It just stuns me when I read that, because at 16 most of us were looking forward to a driver's licence, not combat.

In considering the veterans health care review and the veterans independence program, the first and central need is to develop a trusting relationship between Veterans Affairs Canada and aboriginal veterans. A legacy of poor relations and broken promises forms the backdrop to contemporary initiatives. When aboriginal veterans return to civilian life, they face racism, discrimination, and federal policies driven by the Indian Act administration.

These veterans were never effectively informed of what was available for them, and this is well described in the Senate report you all have a copy of, "Aboriginal Soldiers After the Wars". These experiences are the backdrop you must consider when you're thinking about health programs and other initiatives that involve aboriginal veterans. On a personal basis I want to tell you that I think it's shameful that aboriginal veterans, Métis, and non-status Indians were excluded from compensation. I also think it's another shameful thing that the aboriginal veterans monument remains unfinished.

We've heard from the Royal Canadian Legion about the veterans independence program and its complex eligibility criteria. For aboriginal veterans this complexity is further compounded because aboriginal veterans face a lack of sensitivity to their culture, low literacy and numeracy skills, alienation from benefits and programs, lack of support networks, and lack of community helpers.

Back in 1996 the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples reported that the aboriginal veterans received little or no information concerning benefits and services. In 2002 aboriginal veterans petitioned the United Nations Human Rights Committee as a consequence of the denial of available financial and statutory benefits following their military service. The supporting documents in the NAVA package describe in detail the systemic barriers that inhibited the ability of aboriginal veterans to take advantage of benefits and services. Today these remain unresolved issues for aboriginal veterans who are Métis and non-status Indians.

We would like to advise you, in your work as committee members, to give specific consideration to the needs of aboriginal veterans. I think it's important to emphasize that when you are undertaking your considerations and recommendations, you are speaking and listening to aboriginal veterans.

In 2003 the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs released a report entitled called "Honouring the Pledge: Ensuring Long Term Care for Veterans". This report made no references whatsoever to aboriginal veterans.

Last year the special Senate committee released a report called "Embracing the Challenge of Aging". This report was also weak on the needs of aboriginal veterans. The needs of aboriginal veterans have been sidestepped by many committees of the House and the Senate. The sober reality of this is that it has increased the uncertainties and anxieties in the minds of many aboriginal veterans.

We need a determined, measured, and sustained approach that's going to produce results. NAVA has provided you with 20 recommendations for your consideration. Most of them are focused on long-term care needs of aboriginal veterans, and these recommendations come from aboriginal veterans.

The call for national standards for long-term care of veterans, including care, benefits, and services, is a very important initiative.

These standards can underpin the development of intelligent strategies, policies, and programs. NAVA supports the Canadian Legion in its efforts to see these standards in place. We need to underscore that an aboriginal component should be part of these national standards, as well as all the concomitant strategies, policies, and programs. Aboriginal veterans want to have the capacity to be engaged in the development and implementation of legislation, policies, and programs that have a bearing on aboriginal veterans, but without the resources and capacity, they'll just be pushed to the side.

• (1550)

From a practical perspective, there needs to be aboriginal representation on councils, committees, and subcommittees dealing with the health care needs of veterans.

For example, NAVA is not a member of the Gerontology Advisory Council, which was put together by Veterans Affairs. It's important that there be aboriginal representation on this council and similar bodies, because there are specific health issues and understandings that need to be present in the health promotion programs for aboriginal veterans. Any intervention model for veterans with high-care needs requires an aboriginal component to ensure that there is credibility and commitment to all aboriginal veterans.

Parallel to participation on these bodies, there needs to be long-term capacity so that NAVA can effectively participate. Currently, our capacity is almost nil. NAVA requires the dedication of volunteers such as me to keep the issues alive.

This standing committee needs to send a recommendation that NAVA requires core funding to undertake its activities. This is not a new recommendation; it's the same recommendation that was put forward to the Senate standing committee in 1996, in the document "The Aboriginal Soldier After the Wars".

I want to draw to your attention and tell you about some interesting things. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported that one out of three senior citizens doesn't have the literacy skills to understand prescriptions, medical forms, doctors' instructions, etc. Everyone knows there's low literacy and low numeracy skills among aboriginal veterans, and they don't have health literacy skills. As a result, they're less likely to understand what programs they're entitled to receive support from. They have difficulty following instructions for filling out application forms and all the other paper work associated with this.

The subject has received little attention in Canada. In 2002, the Canadian Public Health Association reported that there was very little knowledge of the link between literacy and health. Perhaps even more worrying is the fact that the CPHA reported that practitioners still do not realize how many people are affected by low literacy skills. Even if an aboriginal veteran can read and comprehend materials from Veterans Affairs, he or she will still have difficulty comprehending the unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts. Literacy needs to be combined with problem-solving ability.

What needs to be done? There needs to be training and educational aids, and communication needs to be undertaken in a culturally sensitive manner and be seen to be part of the existing aboriginal community. Direct input and participation from NAVA will ensure that aboriginal veterans and eligible dependants and survivors are fully benefiting from the existing programs and services. Aboriginal veterans want their cultural experience and traditional roots taken into account when services are designed, communicated, and delivered. Aboriginal veterans need to be engaged in the design and delivery of program initiatives.

As aboriginal veterans age, the sensory changes that come with this stage all have their impact: visual acuity, hearing, agility, mobility, as well as the social and emotional changes. Interpersonal contact needs to take place between trusting individuals. Face-to-face meetings are the preferred source of information exchange for aboriginal veterans, because it's part of the oral tradition of aboriginal people. In many aboriginal communities, veterans will seek understanding and assistance by turning to home care workers, traditional knowledge holders, and community leaders.

To assist your work, NAVA has given you 20 recommendations for the long-term care of aboriginal veterans. In closing, I would like to thank the committee members for your interest and attention to the needs of NAVA.

Thank you.

• (1555)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Claude, I'd like to say that I tremendously respect and appreciate your participation in Korea. I have people who work in my riding association who are Korea vets, and it's commendable, sir, that you took on that task at 16. I'm very impressed.

I have questions that I want to ask, but I realize all of the other committee members have first crack at it.

We first go over to the Liberal Party of Canada, and Mr. Valley, for seven minutes.

**Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.):** Thank you very much for your presentation, and thank you for your service.

I was intrigued when you mentioned northern Ontario. I represent one of its areas, the Kenora riding.

My father landed on D-Day, and he had more than his share of troubles with Veterans Affairs when he came back, in receiving some of the benefits that he could get—I know it was a decade or more—

and he faced a lot of challenges in helping a lot of the first nations people around him to access some of these services.

I've repeatedly brought up to this committee and to other witnesses the challenges we have in the remote sites, the language issues and the fact that somebody doesn't come to remote northern Ontario. They may fly in...another 500 miles north where there are no services at all, not even airports or anything at the time. All these challenges they had...

You mentioned the payments. Also, Claude, you mentioned an individual who worked and ended up staying in Thunder Bay. Do you remember the home community of that individual?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** What was the name of it? His name is Martin, anyway. You might know my uncle from Kenora, Don Petit?

**Mr. Roger Valley:** Yes, I've met him. The reason I ask is that my dad did a lot of services for a lot of people, and the family name I thought I might recognize, because he dealt with this well into the seventies, trying to help people. They had no resources themselves, and he had some, and he tried to move their issues forward.

So this individual was from my riding, then?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** The thing is, they had no other place to go, so we tried to work with them. Also, we'd get some assistance from Cliff Chadderton. We belong to that organization also, so we're funnelling through him because he has all the resources.

• (1600)

**Mr. Roger Valley:** I remember, growing up, my father at the kitchen table working with different files. He was a difficult individual to say no to. He would travel to Thunder Bay and Winnipeg, trying to deal with these other issues for the veterans.

It has to be extremely difficult. You mentioned the payments, and you mentioned the challenges. Some were recognized, and some weren't. Where does it stand today? I believe the information we have here....

Your information was a little bit different, but I'll just read you what we have: "According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, up to April 2007, 1,250 First Nations veterans or surviving spouses had received...payments out of a total of 2,743 applicants...". That was just for first nations. Do you have any idea how many Métis outside of that have served, and what kind of numbers we're talking about? You may have mentioned, and I might have missed them.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** No Métis or non-status received that.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** Do you know how many who served would be Métis or non-status and aren't counted in these?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Yes, there would be about 4,000. That's a rough figure, because a lot of the veterans didn't.... Even my dad you would never think was a Métis, because he looked like a Frenchman, and he could speak good French. Because of discrimination, he went on the French side. We were discriminated against in school, as you're probably aware, and that's why they did that. That's why they couldn't track.... At least, the first nations people were tracked. They came back from the armed forces, and they had a place to go. The Métis didn't.

As far as their education went, as Alastair said.... I know my dad had grade 4. If it weren't for my mom, he wouldn't have gotten the benefits he received. She was communicating with DVA at that time. There was nobody else to support her.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** Just as a matter of pride, I have nothing but respect for French Métis. I married one 30 years ago, and we're still together. She is very difficult to deal with, but she's usually right.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Mine didn't last that long.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** I'm losing my time here.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**A voice:** You're wearing a bullet-proof vest.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Roger Valley:** I'm having fun with this. Often I don't have fun with these discussions.

So these 4,000 are there. Obviously they're in the elder stage of life. If we're going to do something, we have to do something sooner than later. What stage is it at right now? Can you tell me whether we're in active negotiation or nearing the end of negotiation? Have we started since 2002?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Well, nothing's coming back from government. We've applied. We've put it in. As I said, we tried. Through the War Amps, we put in a submission to government, and we did that through Geneva. Nothing happened. We're still waiting for an answer.

To be fair, it's to get the same compensation as the Hong Kong veterans and the merchant navy. It's a fair thing. They put us in the category of first nations, which we cover, as the Chinese and Japanese. They gave them \$20,000 also. They gave the first nation veterans \$20,000. That's the magic figure, I guess. But the thing is that it's pretty bad when you're willing to give up your life for that, and people are not looking at it that way.

Well, that's the way it goes, I guess.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** As you say, they recognize certain groups, and they don't recognize one of the ones that served.

The reason for this committee's study right now is health care. I believe that quality of life is controlled by some of the resources you have in your life. Many of these people you're talking about don't have resources. This could make a big difference to their quality of life, to what they could do in the latter stages of their life. So I think it's important that we recognize this.

I'm going to switch gears slightly. I want to get back to northern Ontario. We talked about the provincial agencies and long-term care. I forget what point it is in your long-term care. Veterans Affairs working with the provincial and territorial health authorities is the challenge I have in my riding. I have people who need service, but they're not going to get it unless they move a thousand miles away. That breaks the family unit, which in aboriginal, first nations, and Métis culture, as you know, is a bond for all of them. It breaks that.

I don't know if you want to add anything to what that is, but it's like fighting up a steep slope to try to get these resources into these small communities. We can do it. In Sioux Lookout we're building a brand new provincial-federal hospital. These things aren't built every day. But we need some allocation to make sure there are a couple of long-term care beds in there. My riding is 60% first nations.

• (1605)

**Mr. Claude Petit:** I'd like to answer that, because we have the same problems in Saskatchewan, where I'm from. I myself pay for some of the rooms. People come down from northern Saskatchewan. Maybe their band will pay for a motel room for one night. And then they're back. If they don't make that appointment with the doctor.... So they phone me, and I pay for the room.

The problem is that they're not taking care of the veterans as they should. When I was president of the Korean veterans in Saskatoon, I had my person approach Veterans Affairs to give us the names of the veterans. They have 500 there. I said, "Give us the names. We'll phone them. We'll have somebody go into your office and phone those veterans to ask them how they're doing." They wouldn't. They wouldn't allow that. It's their policy. We're trying to help them.

There is another thing too. My cousin was in the Second World War, the Korean War, and peacekeeping. He said, "I'm going to die before they do an assessment on me to get a wheelchair." He waited six weeks before somebody came in to do an assessment. And then he had a problem going to the washroom. After my mother passed, I had that, so I brought it. And the Korean veteran's wife died, so we gave him a wheelchair.

You see, that's their job. That's what I'm trying to say. Why don't they phone these people? It takes six weeks before they assess and help this veteran. As you know, the Second World War veterans are 85. The Korean veterans are in their seventies. So they're pretty nearly at the end of their line. These guys are 85 and 86 years old. That's the problem. But the thing is that they need assistance.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Valley.

[Translation]

Now we move to Mr. Perron of the Bloc Québécois.

You have seven minutes.

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ):** Good afternoon, Mr. Petit.

You are confusing me a lot. Could you give me a short history lesson, very short, since I only have seven minutes? You mention Aboriginals, Inuit and Métis, but then you mention a new group that I am not familiar with, the non-status.

Who are the non-status?

● (1610)

[English]

**Mr. Claude Petit:** They were people who were coming off reserve and weren't let back in. The government made that person, like everything else. It's people who were first nations people who came off the reserve and weren't let back in, or married off the reserve. They're non-status.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** Do they have aboriginal blood?

[English]

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Oh, certainly.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** Thank you very much. I did not understand the term non-status.

I agree with your requests, but we should talk about something else today. We should talk about care for veterans. I know that most veterans live in very remote areas. In Abitibi, where I come from in northern Quebec, there is a reserve in a little village called Notre-Dame-du-Nord.

How can we successfully uproot—unfortunately, that is what we are doing—an aboriginal person from his native land and from his family, and make him live out his days in a long-term care facility in Montreal, say? The poor soul will die before he gets to Montreal. I would like to hear your opinion.

[English]

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Yes, that's what'll happen. The thing is, it is the job of Veterans Affairs to find a way to protect these people and to keep them in their homes as long as possible. I think communication between.... Well, everybody knows if there are veterans in their communities. It's their job to do this. This is why.

They have a list of the people who served in the armed forces. That's why I'm saying that, and that's why we're here. They're not doing this.

For example, we have people up north who say they're not going back there because they're refused pension. They are told they don't qualify. It's stuff like that. People are really touchy on this, especially aboriginal people—really touchy. When you tell them they don't qualify, I tell them to go back, because the old saying was that you've got to go to the DVA three or four times before you get accepted. They say, "Well, I'm not going back there again."

That's the way they think. You're not going to change them if they're 80 years old and, as you say, from northern Quebec. How do you communicate?

That's why I went to a newsletter. A lot of them can't read or write or understand. They've no education. How do you communicate? Some guy got up and said, "Well, get on your computer." I said,

"Christ, they haven't got computers, the guys up north." Some of them have, and some of them haven't. They have to have people reading their mail for them. This is the way it goes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** I am going to make another comment, and you can feel free to react.

I know that problems of health and isolation are the same for aboriginal veterans as they are for any elderly aboriginal who is not a veteran, who has not fought with the Canadian armed forces. It is a widespread societal problem, I suppose. I am thinking about health care on reserves and in remote villages and areas.

● (1615)

[English]

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Certainly it is, and that's what I'm saying. It's not only aboriginal veterans; it's other veterans and other people. The elderly people up north who don't have the care won't say too much, especially if they're native. They don't complain too much. It's a family affair, and it's still happening. I don't know how you solve that. It's to make contact with the family somehow and get in with the family. That's the way I work it. I try to get the younger people to talk, especially if they can't talk English or if they talk in their own language, Cree or what have you. When they start talking, then they'll go to see a doctor. They don't even want to go to see a doctor. It's very hard for them even to bring them to the hospital or the doctor's office. They don't want to go.

So what are you going to do about that?

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** That is the problem I face when I have to make recommendations to the government. We have to find solutions together, Mr. Petit and Mr. MacPhee. Would it be too expensive? How can we provide you with services or find any solution when there is a serious shortage of doctors and other professionals in places like Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver? We do not have enough professionals. Furthermore, distance is a serious problem in our health system. Solutions must be found, and that it is not easy.

[English]

**Mr. Claude Petit:** The thing is to communicate. Veterans Affairs have to communicate. We have nothing, and they don't communicate with us. That's the problem. As I just said, when I was with the Korean veterans, I wanted to phone all the veterans, and they wouldn't allow that. How are you going to—

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** Sir, I am sorry, but we cannot blame the Minister of Veterans' Affairs. Some legislation, like the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, is pretty convoluted. Exceptions might be possible, but they are not made because of the act. It is run by lawyers most of the time.



[English]

**Mr. Claude Petit:** The thing is, it's not my job to bring that forward. It's for the Department of Veterans Affairs to bring it to another department. We're very small, as you can see. We don't make too much noise. But the Minister of Veterans Affairs should be passing this on to the health people to have a program up north and have communications.

That's the key thing. How do we service these people? It doesn't matter if they're elderly, white, blue, or black; they're veterans. But they have to have a system to do that. I can't do that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** Mr. Petit, unfortunately, our time has run out. I could have spent hours talking to you.

[English]

**The Chair:** We have time yet, so there will be other opportunities.

Now we go to the NDP and Mr. Stoffer for five minutes.

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

Again, Mr. Petit, thank you for your service to our country as well.

To Mr. McPhee, thank you for the service to NAVA, for what you do as well.

Sir, you said they wouldn't let you call those veterans. Did they tell you why? Was there a legal reason or something?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** I believe it is because it's a policy of theirs not to let out any information like that on who they are.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** If they wouldn't let you do it, did you ask them if they could get someone in there to do it themselves?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** We went through this quite a few times. We've asked them. It's always the same answer: they don't have the staff to do that job. Do you know what I mean?

• (1620)

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** I hear you.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** If you don't have them, then hire more staff. There are a lot of bad stories about veterans being at home and nobody taking care of them. I don't want to go into it.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Yes, sir. That's completely understandable.

Sir, you indicated it would cost about \$200,000 to finish the beautiful monument. By the way, every night I walk by that monument on the way to my apartment, and it is very beautiful. So about \$200,000, you figure, would finish it. Is that correct?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Well, it would be \$230,000 now, because it went up.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** We'll say \$250,000.

You had talked about ensuring that all veterans receive the compensation amount. That means Métis, non-status, etc. Have you figured at all, Mr. MacPhee, how much that would cost? How many people would we be talking about in total? I know some of them may have passed on, and some of them are hard to find. You said before that there are about 4,000, but is the number higher than that?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** It probably is, because they will come out of the woodwork. The thing is—you know what the game is—if there's any money available....

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** I understand that. You don't have the figure, then.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** No, I don't have the figure. We did have a figure. I travelled to Europe with the person who was doing it, and he said around 4,000 that they know of had registered. As I said, a lot of the Métis didn't want to be Métis, because they were discriminated against if they were Métis.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** That's completely understandable.

You had talked about the veterans specifically, but on this committee we deal with the family members as well, and the effect it would have on their spouses or their children in this particular regard. Are you indicating—because I noticed, Mr. MacPhee, that you didn't necessarily mention family on that—that you are also looking for support for them?

We have a VIP program that assists some widows or widowers of veterans. There are other health care concerns. The department has indicated that they're undergoing a health care review. Have you been active in that health care review? Have they come to ask you specifically for your advice on that?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** No. The thing is, I get the VIP....

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** On the health care review, has NAVA not been formally asked?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** No, that's why I'm saying we're not.... Even the money that was given to the first nations—I thought all the aboriginal people were going to receive that, but then it ended up with just the first nations people.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** I have a last question before I'm cut off, and I'll get back to you later. You said you require core funding for NAVA to carry out your operations. What would you be looking at for funding, sir?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** We were getting close to \$100,000. We're getting \$60,000 now because of the cutbacks. It's always the same old thing. We're just barely making it with that. Even coming in to a meeting like this, especially when the government people say, "Well, you pay for it", it takes two months to get your money back. You understand that.

Anyway, the thing is, we have our AGM and we don't get the money for a banquet. I had \$10,000 on my credit card for that.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** If you said, say, \$200,000, would that help?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Oh, certainly. Anything would.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** We'd give you millions, obviously. To be responsible, though, if you had, say, \$200,000, would that be sufficient to do the job you think you could do for those veterans and their families?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** You see, it's very hard to put a figure on it. I'm saying that because I have people in each province and territory...and the Maritimes. By giving them travel claims at the end when we have our AGM, I try to pay for their phone bill, because they're trying to phone all their veterans also.

Part of our policy is that they keep in touch with their veterans, especially if they're older and they're Second World War guys. This is the way we try to pay them back a bit of money, because the guys are complaining, "Geez, my phone bill is \$150 or \$200", and they don't have the money for it. So they can't very well do their job unless they have some funding.

I don't know. We could probably work it out. Depending on how much we receive as core funding, we could divide it up between the provinces and territories.

• (1625)

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Thank you, sir.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm very accommodating with regard to committee members asking whatever questions they want. There were some people raising some questions about how relevant some questions were to health care, but I realize that these witnesses, in a sense, approached us of their own volition, not necessarily particularly in regard to the health care study. So I was pretty accommodating. That's just something to keep in mind.

We now go over to the Conservative Party of Canada, and Mrs. Hinton, for seven minutes.

**Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Welcome to the committee.

I'm not sure where to start, because when I listen to the other questioners, I start writing myself a lot of notes here.

You mentioned the monument. You're referring to the one in Confederation Park, I'm assuming. I would like to tell you that my understanding is that it is finished. It has been completed, but my understanding is that you want to add new panels.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** No, it was never completed.

**Mrs. Betty Hinton:** What part of it is not completed?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** The panels. There's one going around.

**Mrs. Betty Hinton:** Okay, thank you.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** You'll see the one with the panels on and one that's there right now.

You see, the panels are the ones with the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War, and peacekeeping. They're supposed to go on the bottom. They're about 10x8 feet wide, and they cost a lot of money.

**Mrs. Betty Hinton:** Okay. Maybe we could talk about this part of it later. I just wanted to mention that this was my information, that it had been completed.

The VIP program is the program that keeps veterans in their homes. You raised a couple of things today. You're saying that written pamphlets don't work, and that computers don't work. I think I heard you suggest that there needs to be a one-on-one conversation.

You also mention that there are, at a minimum, 4,000 people of Métis or Inuit background who are not receiving benefits. It would pretty much be virtually impossible to phone them one-on-one. Does your organization have people in all parts of the area who might be able to actually deliver some messages about what is available and what isn't? Because you also mentioned that there's a language barrier.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Yes, there is the language barrier, to start off with.

As I just said to Peter, we don't have the money to communicate by phone. The computer is good, if they can use it. They can use it from me to them and then pass a message on if something else comes up. As I said, I met last week with the ombudsman—we have that coming up in the picture for Veterans Affairs—but he has 7,000 people to deal with, so how's he going to do it one-on-one? The thing is that we have a problem because we don't have funds to communicate properly.

I'm saying that when you communicate with aboriginal people, the elders will push you off. So you have to try to get to the younger part of the family and try to tell them, "Listen, it's good for you to do that." I had problems with my mom doing that, getting her into a care home.

**Mrs. Betty Hinton:** I understand.

We're not here to discuss compensation, and we're not here to discuss funding for organizations; we're supposed to be here to discuss what we can do for veterans. I read a few of your recommendations, and there are a few things I'd like to ask you, if I may.

In response to your comment about not being part of the health care review, that's what you're here for today, sir, so that we can get that kind of input from you.

So the questions I have are these. How many members does your organization have? Do you keep a membership list? And how's your organization funded? Those are three key ones about funding. And the fourth one is, could you please tell me what kind of food would fall under the category of number 13 on your list, which says "traditional foods to Aboriginal veterans". Could you please describe what "traditional food" would be, so that we can all understand it a little better?

**Mr. Alistair MacPhee:** I'll be glad to answer that question.

I just want to take one step back. When the aboriginal veteran goes into long-term care or into a hospital or something, it's quite a shock going from the aboriginal environment into the, for the sake of a better word, mainstream environment, where there's no sensitivity to his aboriginality, even language, or whatever. I was reading the minutes of the previous meetings you had, and you had talked about the loneliness that the veteran feels in the system. I would say that would be compounded for the aboriginal veteran, because not only are they in a strange environment, away from the community, but the food they're being served has very little relation to their cultural background.

I think that some acknowledgement of the traditional foods or some process of having traditional foods coming through the system would be of great value.

•(1630)

**Mrs. Betty Hinton:** What is a traditional food?

**Mr. Alastair MacPhee:** Oh, I'm sorry. Traditional foods would be deer, moose, wild salmon, rabbit. It would vary across the country and according to the aboriginal group you're dealing with—Métis, Inuit, those on reserves.

I think that's the best way I can answer your question.

**Mrs. Betty Hinton:** Well, in terms of deer, moose, caribou—you name it—for the first 10 years of my life, that's precisely what I ate. My father was quite a hunter. By the way, I am Métis.

To get back to what we can do for you today in terms of the health care review, you did also mention that you are not a part of the Gerontology Advisory Council. I gather from your comments that you'd like to be part of that. I'm thinking you would probably come at that from a cultural perspective.

Is that your intent? Is that why you want to be a part of it, that you believe there are differences between the cultural needs of aboriginal, Métis, Inuit, and non-aboriginal people as far as the gerontology part is concerned? Is that the reason you'd like to be part of it?

**Mr. Alastair MacPhee:** Absolutely. I think for the credibility of an exercise like the one being undertaken, it has to have aboriginal engagement and aboriginal people speaking on those issues. Ideally, aboriginal veterans would speak for themselves. That would be the purest form.

As you've heard Claude say, the NAVA organization has no capacity to be engaged in that type of activity. However, if there were capacity dollars for them to do that, they could do that.

**Mrs. Betty Hinton:** Before he cuts me off—and he will, he's vicious—

**The Chair:** You're already cut off.

**Mrs. Betty Hinton:** Oh, he did. Never mind.

**The Chair:** I just go by the clock. You all agreed on it originally.

Thank you, Mrs. Hinton.

We'll now go to the Liberal Party of Canada. We're on the second round, so it will be five minutes instead of seven.

Mr. Murphy, for five minutes.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Petit or Mr. MacPhee, you may have stated this in your opening remarks, but I didn't pick it up. Your organization represents status, non-status, Métis, and Inuit?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Yes.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** Is there a separate organization representing other status aboriginal veterans?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** There wasn't supposed to be. This is why this organization was formed. It was formed by Ron Irwin. At that time he was the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** But is there now?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Well, we're trying to keep it together, but they're breaking off. They're receiving money, so.... You know, that talks.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** From what you're saying, then, there is another aboriginal veterans organization that's receiving money?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Yes.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** And they're based out of what province? Or is there a head office in Ottawa here?

•(1635)

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Well, the first nations president comes out of Sarnia. I was at a meeting with him last week here in town.

But they're a global funding organization. They fund their own veterans; there's no funding going directly to their veterans.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** Okay.

And I thank you very much for your presentations. I listened carefully.

Let's deal with the VIP program. This is a great program. This is a good program, one of the better programs that the government offers. It's not as extensive as it should be, but it is a good program.

You're saying it's not a matter of eligibility, it's that the program is not geared toward aboriginals living in rural and remote parts of Canada, and it's not geared toward the aboriginal culture. Is that correct? If aboriginals wanted to go through all the hoops and bells and whistles, they would qualify if they were entitled to it. Is that right?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Certainly.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** But does Veterans Affairs have any employees of aboriginal descent working for them to go to these areas and deal with the aboriginal community?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** I know that in Saskatoon, where I come from, they have one aboriginal person working there. I don't know how much he travels. He came to one of our meetings and explained the VIP program, which is what you're talking about, and some other new programs for veterans who are coming back from Afghanistan—stuff like that.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** What you're saying—and I agree with you—is that somebody who lives in rural Saskatchewan, in a remote aboriginal community, has to deal with somebody in, I assume, Regina. Is that correct?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Regina or Saskatoon.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** So there isn't a connect between the bureaucracy in the larger cities and the people living in the remote and rural areas.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** That's right. They'd have to come into Saskatoon. Their appointments to see doctors or specialists and so on are usually in the Saskatoon-Regina area. My complaint about this is that they're not....

I'm drawing a 92% pension—it got racked up from a couple of jobs out in Edmonton—but I don't see a doctor. They don't call me in for two years. They don't check on me to see if I'm dying. I get the VIP program. They don't ask me how my health is until I go in to see the doctor again, which is every two years.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** I'd like to move on to the core payment of \$20,000 for status aboriginals. There are other core payments for merchant veterans and so on. I still don't quite understand this myself, but for the non-status aboriginals, or the Métis, certainly there would be records of their service. Were they looking for, or were they entitled to...?

I know there was tremendous mistreatment of aboriginals who came back and who weren't eligible for land under the Soldier Settlement Board after World War II. The mistreatment has been well documented and well acknowledged. With regard to a non-status aboriginal, I appreciate the problems in terms of remoteness and so on, but I'm not clear on the core payment. What would be the basis of this?

Mr. MacPhee or Mr. Petit.

**Mr. Alastair MacPhee:** I'd be glad to answer that question.

The essence of the complaint was that aboriginal veterans were unable to qualify for the benefits under the Veterans Charter of 1945.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** That's right.

**Mr. Alastair MacPhee:** The core of the NAVA membership complaint is that there was a lack of understanding of the pre-war conditions that the Métis and non-status Indians had lived in. There were low levels of literacy and numeracy, and poor education.

More importantly, there was even a lack of interest and a lack of will to think about the needs of these veterans. There were no procedures established to deal with this group at all. In the document that NAVA submitted to the UN, they called this a flagrant discrimination against aboriginal veterans who were non-status Indians and Métis—when, by the way, there were more of them, sir, than status Indians.

That's the essence of the claim. There was no point in the process where people revealed their aboriginality, that they were non-status or Métis or anything like that. As Claude says, when the bullets are flying, nobody's asking you—

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** Yes, and that explains it better. What you're saying is that there was total cultural disconnect between this group and the government of the time, and because of that cultural disconnect, they weren't able to connect.

**Mr. Alastair MacPhee:** Yes.

**Hon. Shawn Murphy:** Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

• (1640)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Gaudet of the Bloc Québécois, *cinq minutes*.

[Translation]

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

I think I saw you for the first time in 2003, when we made the trip to Korea. I was part of the Canadian delegation. That was the first time I was able to appreciate first-hand the work veterans did. I realized that, in Korea, you got the recognition that you should get here at home.

In the spring of 2007, I took part in a meeting of the Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. That was when I

found out that, out of a budget of \$10 billion, \$4.6 billion went to administration. Does the same thing happen at Veterans Affairs Canada with the aboriginal association? I am going to put the question to Mr. MacPhee.

[English]

**Mr. Alistair MacPhee:** That's a good question. In the world of aboriginal people in Canada, when you hear about huge amounts of money being spent, that's for Indian Act bands and reserves. That's where the majority of the money goes, and non-status Indians and Métis are simply left with the.... There are smaller amounts of funding that flow from the federal government.

For example, I know—and I have seen it in minutes of your previous meetings—that you were talking about type 2 diabetes. You heard testimony from Health Canada that there was an aboriginal diabetes strategy. Well, it sounds good, except that it only has prevention and education dollars for non-status Indians and Métis. Any health strategy needs five pillars—care, treatment, research, and other elements—to be a successful strategy.

So that's the story of how it rolls out, and that's a core element in how the federal government chooses to deal with aboriginal people.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** Thank you.

I am going to read recommendations 15 and 16, which I am sure you know by heart.

(15) Veterans Affairs Canada in cooperation with NAVA establish clear guidelines for federal officials so that they can monitor culturally-sensitive long-term care for aboriginal veterans and explicitly those facilities operating under contract to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I would like Mr. Petit or Mr. MacPhee to tell me what that means.

[English]

**Mr. Alistair MacPhee:** Number 15 is what you'd like an explanation on, I understand.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** I do not want you to explain it; I want you to tell me what you are expecting from the government.

[English]

**Mr. Alistair MacPhee:** Yes. I think NAVA is recommending that officials within VAC work with aboriginal people, with aboriginal veterans, to prepare guidelines on how a culturally sensitive long-term care program could be put together. That would seem to me to be a very rudimentary approach to this, and a beginning stage.

Right now there's none of this dialogue taking place, so it's no wonder these programs don't exist. The department needs to be undertaking more dialogue with aboriginal veterans and with aboriginal people to develop things like this. There are all sorts of tools that could be developed: guidelines, training programs, and all sorts of things.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** In my opinion, recommendations 17 and 18 say the same thing as recommendation 16. I quote:

(18) Veterans Affairs gives high priority to aboriginal cultural programs for aboriginal veterans in long-term care facilities.

I understand the idea. My mother, who has always lived in the country, would not be able to go and live in the middle of a big city. That would kill her within two days, three at the most.

I would like to know what it means for you.

[English]

**Mr. Alistair MacPhee:** This is a very important point. We were talking earlier about the aboriginal veteran going into a long-term care facility. It's quite a shock for anyone to go into a long-term care facility, let alone someone who is aboriginal. You may have been an elder in the community, and now you're just a patient number in the long-term care facility. You have no connection with the cultural program.

So I believe Veterans Affairs should be involved in building supportive cultural programs, working with the aboriginal community to provide these. People could come in; traditional knowledge holders could come in; cultural groups could come in and visit the veterans, and this would lessen the shock.

Thank you.

• (1645)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Gaudet.

I'm going to take this opportunity, since it's now Conservative time for five minutes, to ask a few questions myself.

When I was down in the Pentagon, they had a lovely monument or memorial to the Choctaw talkers, who were able to beat the German or Japanese decryption machines during the Second World War because of their communications.

Then, as well, the other example I think of—and you may know him—is Ed Borchert. He ran the canteen at the Museum of the Regiments in Calgary. He's been involved with either Rangers or Pathfinders or something like that. It has a very high failure rate in the Canadian Forces. They go in as a pre-emptive group to set up landing strips and that type of thing. There's an 80% dropout rate. He's an impressive guy.

There's one thing I'd like to ask you about. It's not necessarily specific to health care or the review per se, but I'd like to get your thoughts on this. Hopefully the parliamentary secretary won't get too upset. The Gurkhas had a proud tradition of serving in the British Empire. They were known as a warrior people with regard to their approach to these types of things. I wonder whether or not there's ever been any talk or consideration of an aboriginal regiment inside the Canadian Forces.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** It came to my attention. Actually, there was a guy down at the hotel who said, "Why don't you guys start your own regiment?"

I brought it forward to a general, actually, when we were on a trip overseas. You couldn't start a regiment, to start off with, but my idea was that you could start it with something like we have with the Raven program. The other one that's done in Wainwright is the Bold Eagle program. There are kids coming out of there, young people. I was at the one in Victoria. It would be a good idea to start something like that, if they came into one group. Then eventually you could

form a battalion-strength regiment—or not a battalion, but a regiment, because all the natives are dying off.

**The Chair:** You mentioned that the Bold Eagle program is associated with Wainwright, and there is this other Raven program?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** I sit on that committee. It's in Victoria, and it's a naval program. There are young people coming in right from Winnipeg. I also put forward for the air force to get the three different groups...so they can serve if they want to.

**The Chair:** That's interesting. So you're quite sympathetic to that idea.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** I am, yes. It's based on what I do. That's why I got the Order of Canada. I work with young people to try to get them off the streets and straighten them up. We have a couple of guys who ended up going to university.

I'm chairman of the friendship centre in Saskatoon. I'm also trying to get a cadet group going. That's another part of the program that would move them into the Bold Eagle and Raven programs, and they could continue on.

Once they get there, it's the discipline that does it. It doesn't matter which way you look at it. It could be white, blue, black, or green; it doesn't matter. The young people nowadays need that. You can see the gangs around Edmonton and Calgary. Winnipeg especially is really bad, and even Saskatoon. I keep painting my garage door. It's really bad stuff.

• (1650)

**The Chair:** I think it's a great idea, sir. I'm glad to hear that you're sympathetic. Who knows? Maybe at some point in the future I'll pursue that with you.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Certainly, I'd like to.

**The Chair:** I see it being of great value.

Well, that takes up my time, and I'm 30 seconds short. Isn't that impressive? Don't I set an example?

Now we go back to the Liberal Party of Canada, with Mr. St. Denis, for five minutes.

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

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here. It's extremely helpful. We're trying to get our heads around not only the issues facing veterans generally but also—and I think this is of some concern, at least to me—the fact that our veterans are spread out among so many different organizations. I know there's some sort of association of associations, but in the long term, the more they can work together, the better it will be, I think.

I'd like to focus a little bit on the issue of health services in terms of quality of life for our veterans. You mentioned literacy as an issue for aboriginal veterans.

My friend Roger Valley was explaining that a lot of veterans—I hope I have this right, Roger—who entered the service learned English. They were away from their homes for a period of time, went back into their communities, on the reserve or otherwise, and in many cases they lost contact with their traditional language. Maybe they could communicate in some way, but then, when it came to English, they lost the ability to speak it. They could understand English but they couldn't speak it, because there was nobody around who spoke English in some of those communities.

Do you have a sense, even anecdotally, of what percentage of aboriginal veterans—status, non-status, Métis, Inuit—just aren't accessing programs, VIP included, because of the language barrier?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** When this organization first started, we did a survey, but the majority of the veterans are gone now. They were mainly Second World War. There are hardly any Inuit, although there may be a few. We have one in our organization here.

As to a percentage, I couldn't put a finger on it. What would you like to know about it?

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** I'm just wondering, when it comes to the aboriginal veterans population generally, to what extent literacy is a barrier that makes them too shy or too reluctant to even try to access programs. Or do they generally try to get some help?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Oh, you'd never get an answer on that. Even when you do an interview with them, they won't tell you what education they have. The elderly people will tell you that they don't have any. They'll still sign a cheque with an X. That's how bad it is. People don't realize it.

So they won't admit it. They're ashamed.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** Then I suppose it might be a reasonable assumption that literacy is some barrier for a significant percentage.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** For a lot, yes.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** You mentioned that you had asked Veterans Affairs if you could have the names and phone numbers, and addresses I suppose, of the Korea veterans?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** No, all the veterans.

•(1655)

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** So all the veterans in Saskatchewan?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** In the Saskatoon area. Veterans Affairs runs in districts, so they come into that office. When I was president of the Korean veterans, I had one of our liaison officers in our organization go and see if we could get a phone and an office, and we'd do the calling.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** Just to follow on that point, from one point of view I can understand an office not wanting to hand out—without permission, certainly—somebody's name and phone number because of privacy concerns. Do you think it would make sense for somebody to...?

If the department were willing to ask a veteran if they minded the department giving their name and number to NAVA or to the Legion, perhaps we could turn the onus back to the veteran to give permission to be contacted. I don't think anybody's asked that big question. I know that my friend Mr. Valley, from Kenora, has asked often, because as members of Parliament we don't know who the

veterans are—other than through the Legion and so on. But what if veterans were willing to give permission?

I wonder if I could get a comment on that, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** I'll comment on it.

We have an office; our meetings are held right in the Legion. Every Legion across Canada has a service officer. The only way they can track their veterans is through membership. And that's the way we track ours.

I don't think the Department of Veterans Affairs is going to give you names.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** Thank you.

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

We now go to the Conservative Party of Canada, and Mr. Shipley, for five minutes.

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

Thank you, Mr. Petit, for coming out, and also certainly for all you're doing now. Of course you were active in the Canadian Forces, but you are now also helping veterans and helping young people as well, guiding them through their lives.

A group has started up in one of the first nations around me, and it's actually very good; it's just what you're saying. It's encouraging a number of young people and giving them discipline and purpose. It's keeping them away from the gangs and giving them a focus on what they can do with their lives.

This is about health care, so I want to go back to what you were talking about in terms of communication. We have continually heard the same thing with regard to veterans: how do we get people to ask for help when it comes to health care services, and how do we make those services available in terms of them knowing and understanding that it's there?

And you're absolutely right, in some cases it's literacy, in some cases it's pride. They don't want to admit that they have a health issue or that they need help to stay in their homes. We all agree on how important it is to stay in your home as long as you can, and certainly within your community as long as you can.

My understanding is that Veterans Affairs also has an aboriginal outreach officer. Do you know about that?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Yes. We tried to approach him for some funds. There you have to jump through hoops again.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Well, it may not always be about funds. My understanding is that they're available to help family members in terms of understanding the programs, what the services are, what the benefits might be. I'm wondering if you have reached out to those people in the communities to ask for advice.

As well, you mentioned that you went to the ombudsman. You've had a meeting with our new ombudsman, and I'm glad to hear that. Can you see where that position will be helpful in terms of some of the concerns you've raised?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Yes, it will help. He's still putting the structure together on how he's going to approach it, how he's going to approach government.

But what was your first question again?

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** The first part was about the aboriginal outreach officer. Their mandate is not about funding; it's about trying to help raise awareness of programs and services and benefits.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Yes, I know. I said that because we're not invited to those things. When they're putting things like that together for aboriginal people, I wish we'd be invited to participate. There are only...different people that are invited to these things.

• (1700)

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** But my understanding, through Veterans Affairs, is that this individual—or individuals—can be contacted to be used as a communications person to work with you or other veterans and help in terms of programs or benefits.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Certainly, but we don't even know about the program.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I think that's what they do, though.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Well, they don't communicate with us to tell us what the program's about.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Okay.

You meet in Legions, you say. Do the Legions know about these programs?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** They probably do. Their service officer probably does.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Do you have a good, strong relationship, then, with the Legions in terms of working with those service providers?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** I'm a member of the Legion, but I don't.... You know, I have other things to do.

What I'm trying to get at is why doesn't DVA talk to us as a group and try to tell us what is available—as you're saying—to our families or our veterans?

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I guess it's just sort of the other way around, if you know about it. Maybe that initiative has to be taken to them for anyone—not just your organization—to ask them about the services they can provide.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** That's right. I would like the information to flow out to me, because I'd put it in the newsletter. Anything that comes out that veterans need goes into the newsletter. Something like that goes to all the friendship centres across Canada. The key contacts for us are the friendship centres, the Métis locals, and the first nations band offices.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Just so I understand then, I'm not sure what you're looking for in terms of—since we've gotten into the discussion of it—this particular officer or this particular program that will help you understand the services and benefits that can be provided. Is it that we need to feed you or that you need the information numbers so you can put them in your brochures?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** No, I want them to contact me. The thing is that I believe it's their job to make sure all the veterans groups know

about these programs. As soon as I know, that will be passed on to my membership.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** I like showing the clock, because that way there's nothing arbitrary. They know they're over time with their questions.

Now we're going to the New Democratic Party, and Mr. Stoffer, for five minutes.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Monsieur Petit, I forgot to bring you greetings on behalf of Noel Knockwood, whom you know. He is the spiritual leader of the Mi'kmaq and also a Korean veteran himself.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Yes, I know. I've dealt with him.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** I called him today and said I was going to be seeing you. He said to say hello.

On the issue of communication, we hear that an awful lot as a committee, and it doesn't matter which party you're with. What's the best way to communicate? Is it through the Internet? Is it online? Is it through newsletters? Is it through public forums? Is it through the Legion? How is it? It's probably a combination of every one of them, right?

I tend to agree with you on the one-on-one, given the cultural concerns of the first nations people, because of the differences of their culture as compared to the traditional culture that we have in Canada.

As Madame Hinton indicated, that would be a challenge to do. It's easy to say that, but it's difficult to accomplish it. I'll definitely take that back.

As a sidebar, I appreciate Mr. Anders' concerns on the aboriginal regiment. I actually never thought of that myself, but I think it could have some very good merit down the road. We did have the black No. 2 Construction Battalion, the first all-black battalion in World War I. They had to go to places like Vimy Ridge with only shovels. They were only allowed to dig and work; they couldn't shoot until the very end, when someone thought, maybe we had better give these guys a gun to help them out.

You've had an opportunity now to meet with this committee, and you've had an opportunity to meet the ombudsman. Have you had an opportunity to meet with Mr. Thompson or his staff to discuss some of these recommendations you have? Have you requested an opportunity to meet with him at a time that's convenient to go over some of these recommendations?

• (1705)

**Mr. Claude Petit:** These are new recommendations that came from our organization, from the different provinces and territories, because they're different. As you say, communication is different in the bands. Even as veterans, they won't talk to you. You know how it is. It's bad.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** I understand that. Are you going to be requesting a meeting with Mr. Thompson when you get a chance or when he has an opportunity?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** I've requested a lot of meetings with him. I haven't touched base with him yet.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Not yet, okay.

This is my last question. A couple of years ago we went on a trip, and one of your fellows—I forget his name, but he had a ukulele. What was his name again? He was from NAVA, and he played the ukulele all the time.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Oh, you mean...?

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Bob? I forget his name. I'm not sure of his name, but I promised him some lobsters, and I haven't done that. But he promised me one of those ties.

Thank you very much for coming today.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Stoffer.

Now Mr. Sweet says he has a question.

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** I have just a couple of quick questions.

First, Mr. Petit, thank you very much for your service, and not only your Korean service. The Order of Canada on your chest means that you must have done something very substantial to receive that award from the Governor General, and it's appreciated.

I want to ask you two questions. There was some talk about some other organizations that have broken off from yours. What is the total number of organizations in Canada today that represent native, aboriginal, Inuit, Métis, and first nations concerns? Are there half a dozen?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** No, there are only three key groups. But as I said, they handle their own group. They're funded globally, and some of the funding comes from Ottawa to them.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Okay.

I think you mentioned that your membership is 4,000. Did I get that right?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** No, it's 400. It's something like 4,000 when we're talking about payment for—

**Mr. David Sweet:** Right; 4,000 is the potential outreach.

In terms of the outreach concern, getting the message out to the individuals and making sure they know about the services, etc., has it been your experience that once that connection is made they are happy, by and large, with the services provided to them?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Well, take the newsletter as an example. We didn't have any French-speaking veterans. We have American veterans who are in Quebec, but now I'm getting, from New Brunswick, French-speaking veterans who can't even speak English. We're starting to receive them through that newsletter.

**Mr. David Sweet:** I've gotten your message loud and clear over the last hour and a half that the key thing is bridging—in terms of language, in terms of technology, in terms of person-to-person—but once that bridge is made, once you actually connect with someone in your community and they get the services from Veterans Affairs, by and large are they happy?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Well, they're always having a problem with the services, but still we try to assist them. Cliff Chadderton helps us out a lot. He has a lot of power in there, I guess, and he has a lot of resource people who can help put the package together for the veteran. You need a lot of information before you even go to DVA.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Let me just try to isolate it once more. If Cliff gets involved, all the forms and everything are done, and the application is appropriate, by and large are they happy with the services they're getting, when all that's looked after?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** That's if it's approved. Getting it approved is the key thing. I went to them about four or five times before I got approved.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Okay, but how about after it's approved? By and large, are you...?

I'm trying to simply isolate, sir, where your concern is. I think the key thing is the outreach—including, of course, some of the other things in here, such as the facilities and making the food culturally sensitive. But in terms of individual services, when you do apply for them properly, after the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, and you do eventually get the services, by and large is the community happy with the services they're getting?

● (1710)

**Mr. Claude Petit:** No, they're not. There's always something they didn't receive or that wasn't approved. It's a personal thing. But they're still not happy with the treatment they get from the Department of Veterans Affairs, to put it bluntly.

**Mr. David Sweet:** So there are other issues, even, well outside of these recommendations.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** That's right. Take me, for example—

**Mr. David Sweet:** Did you discuss those with the ombudsman when you were there?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** No, we haven't had the chance yet. He hasn't got it in place yet. He hasn't started it.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Okay, but you had a conversation with him, you said, to brief him about your organization, etc.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Oh, certainly he knows; I was invited. And I have proposals going in on how we were mistreated and in terms of communication—as I've said before, that's the problem—between us and our veterans. We haven't got the funds to do it.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Sweet, that was right on five minutes, five exactly; I'm so impressed.

Now we'll go to Monsieur Perron.

[Translation]

You have five minutes, Mr. Perron.

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** This will be brief, Mr. Petit. I sense some frustration in your answers. Things are not moving quickly enough for you and you do not feel well served.



My question is a delicate one. Aboriginals are known for not voting regularly. Their participation rate is very low, and they have little political clout as a result. Could this participation in the political process be one of the reasons why you feel that you get indifferent help, or an indifferent reception, from Veterans Affairs Canada and from politicians like us, myself included?

[English]

**Mr. Claude Petit:** I don't think we're getting enough attention from anybody—from the politicians, from Veterans Affairs. I don't know; anyone I speak to, it goes dead.

We've never even had an answer from the submission we made two or three years ago to government, to the Department of Veterans Affairs, concerning the proposal that was done for the Hong Kong veterans and the merchant navy. To go on that line, the people who deserve it get it. That's it.

It's not fair that just first nations guys get \$20,000. It's not fair to the Métis and non-status and Inuit. We're still aboriginal people, and that's entrenched in the Constitution. But we didn't receive it and we weren't told why. The department made their own decisions on how they were going to receive it.

That's another thing. As I said before, they had to jump through hoops to get that money. I had to help one person from northern Ontario get his \$20,000.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** I understand your explanation, but I am trying to find out why things are like they are. There is no reason. I had an outlandish idea, maybe a stupid one, as I was listening to you. Is it because you do not vote in sufficient numbers and have no political clout?

I do not understand why you get no answers. I do not understand why people do not listen to you. I do not understand. There is no reason. Why? Is it because of your lack of political clout? What is it? Why are you not listened to? That is my question.

[English]

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Well, well, well, it's government. It's government. It has nothing to do with the way I vote. I go into that cubicle by myself—

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** But you guys are voting—

**Mr. Claude Petit:** No, no, the thing is.... Maybe I'll move to Quebec.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Claude Petit:** But I don't think that has anything to do with voting. The first nations people, or the aboriginal people of Canada, this was their land. There were agreements made for them, and I think they deserve it.

I'm Métis. My ancestor came from France and married a native girl. That's why I'm a Métis. I'm a French Métis. This is the land of the first nations people, and I think they should be treated like that. Everything they ask for should be coming from the other population of Canada. Think of it that way. That's the way I look at it.

I don't have to go and vote to say that I'm an aboriginal guy, nor does anybody else. It really upsets me that we have to vote to win something; especially as a veteran. I don't think so.

About the first nation people, you hear a lot of complaining about a lot of other things they're doing in terms of health especially, about gangs, and dope, and stuff like that. Nobody's doing anything. I'm trying to help the cadets in that Bold Eagle program, and there's the Raven program in Victoria. If we had more programs like that for aboriginal kids...but not only aboriginal people; it would help the other population of Canada.

You have to remember that they were the first people here. That is their land. There were agreements made for their land with the Government of Canada. I think we have to look at it that way.

I don't have to vote to get some money. If they don't want to give it to me, it's up to them. I go into that cubicle by myself. I vote the way I want to vote.

And you're right too, because a lot of governments look at it that way. As you know, Saskatchewan is now PC—we were NDP for a long time—so that has a lot of effect.

• (1715)

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** I do not think so, sir. I think that it is more the fact that you do not vote.

[English]

I have 12 seconds left, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** No, you're plus; you're at six minutes, ten seconds.

We'll go to Mr. Valley, with the Liberal Party, for five minutes.

I would just warn everybody that we expect the bells to ring at any second.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** Nice warning. I get to speak until the bells ring; that's good.

I want to explain something, Claude, and I'd like you to correct me if I'm wrong. This is from memory, and sometimes I'm accused of not listening as well as I can remember.

I spoke earlier about my father. When they were released from the service in 1945 and 1946, they were allowed so much money. There's a term for it, and I'm wondering if you know the term.

**A voice:** Gratuities.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** Okay.

As I mentioned earlier, my father was a bit of a scrapper and it still took him a decade to get this. It was very specific. It had to be for a business. He ended up buying a home with it, and it paid for more than a third of the home. This is what first nations, aboriginal, and Métis were all refused generally because they simply couldn't fill out the forms. My father was never successful in helping anybody because they couldn't fill out the forms themselves.

Is that roughly correct? Is that what happened at the end of the Second World War and a bit later? Is that what the government at some point in 2002 recognized when they said, "We have to make a payment because we've done something wrong", but only partly filled the picture in?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** My dad got a house through the DVA, but his partner, who really got shot up in Italy—First Division—lived on the reserve and couldn't get a house. He lived in a log shack. And yet they were veterans of the same regiment.

It was partly their own band that did this to them. They said, "You've got land here. Why do you need land?" They were negotiating.

As to the \$2,400 in gratuity payments, whether or not you were a first nations person you got that thing, but half of those guys didn't get it. I think that's why the payment was made of \$20,000; it was the gratuity payment.

• (1720)

**Mr. Roger Valley:** From my memory—again, I was a little kid then—they didn't get it because the forms and the criteria were so restrictive. My father couldn't get it for a decade because he couldn't fit into any of the little grooves. He wasn't first nation in any way and he wasn't a quitter. That's how difficult it was.

I'm just trying to explain to my colleagues here how difficult this was, let alone if you had a language barrier or lived 500 miles away from the person you had to talk to. That's what I'm trying to drive at. That's why the government at some point made a compensation claim but missed part of the boat.

Is that what you'd say?

**Mr. Claude Petit:** Yes, I'd say that. If it weren't for my mom, my dad wouldn't have gotten his small holding loan through DVA. It was so complicated, they even had to go to a lawyer to finish it off. My mom didn't know a lot of the criteria in there.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** I know that Alastair has a comment, but I did want to mention this. I didn't want to give lawyers any credit, but this was exactly how my father got it in the end for his home. He went through a lawyer.

**Mr. Alastair MacPhee:** I want to mention a story that I heard from Cliff Chadderton.

He was in the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, and he had a lot of Métis in his platoon and regiment. They were excellent snipers and great soldiers. He said that after the war, everybody was anxious to get back home and get back to a normal life. Several years later, I believe, he decided to look up these Métis guys to see what they were doing. He drove to northern Manitoba to find them, and there they were, living exactly as they had back in the thirties. They hadn't accessed any benefits. They were back living the traditional way.

That's when the light bulb went off in his mind that there was something wrong with this program.

In many ways, that's what we're dealing with today.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** That's what I remember from sitting around that table; my dad had gotten this house because he had served, and they had served and received nothing. They were never successful because of the language barrier, the filling out of the forms, and all the other issues they had to deal with.

Very quickly, before the chair cuts me off or the bells go, I can't tell you how many times around this table I've raised the issue of not knowing who we serve, whether it's the veterans in the area or the veterans returning from Afghanistan. We have difficulty finding that out. Having to deal with the lag time of the number of decades that you've had to deal with in trying to find these people, I can recognize your frustration. I've said here that there has to be some way we can find out who our veterans are so that we can contact them, even if it's as simple as, when they're released from the service, notifying them of their MP and the contact number and everything else they need to contact us. We don't know who they are unless they come by, or we happen to meet them, or through word of mouth, or at the Legion. It's very difficult for us, and it's something I think we fail at miserably, trying to contact our veterans.

I don't know if you want to comment on that before we move on. Thanks again for coming out today.

**Mr. Claude Petit:** It would be a good idea if we were informed. We're not informed about these things. MPs especially should be informed that they have a young guy in Afghanistan, or that he was serving and is coming home. I have friends who have kids overseas, doing three terms over there. Three runs at it; that's not very nice.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Valley.

From the Conservative Party, Mr. Cannan, for five minutes.

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

We're just about out of time, and we still have to deal with a witness submission, so I'd like to thank you both for appearing here today.

I'd also like to thank you for your service. I'm looking at your well-deserved medals, and I'm thinking you must have a back brace to prop all of them up; they're a lot of weight.

Basically, we're supposed to be talking about health care and the services required to deal with your organization. I think the discussion has gone way off on several occasions. I know this government is far from perfect, but we've done more for veterans in the last couple of years than any government I know of.

I represent Kelowna—Lake Country in the Okanagan, and the B. C. Métis have their convention in my riding each year. We have some of the best and most progressive aboriginal communities in Canada.

So I think we have to recognize that there's a long way to go. I appreciate your comments and what you've put in writing. There's always room for improvement in communication, and I'll make sure that we make the minister and the staff aware of that.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Cannan was the last speaker I had on the list.

We are close to the time with regard to the bells, and we do have a matter of business with regard to a potential future witness.

With that, I'd like to thank our witnesses very much. I think some of us may be approaching you afterwards, at some point in the future, with regard to some of the ideas discussed here. And thank you very much for your service to the country. I'll let members get up to greet you or to say goodbye, as they will.

Members, I'll carry on to the next piece of business before the bells start going on us and the House carries out a vote.

Mr. Cannan has submitted the name of Helen Gough to be a potential witness for our health care review. She is an occupational therapist.

Mr. Cannan, do you wish to speak to that at all?

• (1725)

**Mr. Ron Cannan:** Sure, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

This is the young lady who, with her husband, sat in on the last committee meeting here. She actually works for Veterans Affairs but will be appearing on her own behalf as a professional occupational therapist. Her husband is a captain currently serving with our forces.

She is very interested and would like to provide some insight, in terms of the professional expertise she's garnered to date, on how we can improve and add to the health care review we're embarking on right now. She'll try to provide some suggestions from her experience so that we can make an improved and more efficient health care system for our veterans.

**The Chair:** I'm taking a list now of people who want to comment.

Mr. St. Denis is first, Mr. Stoffer is on deck.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** I won't take long.

Was this the couple sitting straight behind you, over by the cooler? Okay. Obviously they're local people, so I don't see a problem with that, but—

**Mr. Ron Cannan:** Actually, right now they're stationed in B.C., but they're being transferred to Edmonton. She was here for some occupational therapist meetings on Monday.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** Oh, so we're talking about bringing her in from British Columbia.

**Mr. Ron Cannan:** Yes.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** Okay.

Well, before we hear more comments on that, do we have a timeline? I know that we have our visits to Petawawa and Valcartier lined up, so in terms of putting the report to bed, the next chapter, however we want to consider it, we should talk about that too.

**The Chair:** If I may, in many respects it's all pending on these last few trips. You can't really do the trip if you've already completed the report. The trip is contingent on the report. So once the trips have taken place, then I think the report follows right on the heels of that.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** We have a lot of stuff. I'm assuming that Michel, with the help of Melissa for those few meetings, will have all of this more or less organized.

**The Chair:** It will be a lot of work on Michel's part.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** Yes.

Okay, thank you.

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

Mr. Stoffer.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Actually, I spoke to her and to her husband ever so briefly the other day, when they were here. I think she's a pretty dynamic lady who could offer a lot to our committee. So I would support that.

Again, as Mr. St. Denis said, if we get a chance when we come back from our two-station tour, perhaps we could finalize when we could have either an interim or final draft of our report.

**The Chair:** Sure.

• (1730)

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** I think it's fairly well understood that once we get those trips out of the way—because part of the report is pending on them—we would proceed with that. I think everybody is under that understanding.

We're giving Michel a heads-up—and he's nodding in agreement—so we can all expect that.

With that, I'll call the meeting adjourned.





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