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## **Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, June 10, 2008**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Rob Anders**

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## Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

Tuesday, June 10, 2008

• (1545)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC)):** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. This is yet another meeting of our Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. Today is a rather special occasion. We have the honour of the presence of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

We're calling this the study for the appellation of Room 112-N of Centre Block, this being the room in which we have held our veterans affairs meetings for quite some time. People are anxious that it be decorated appropriately, and we have moved a motion to that effect.

I assume that Mr. Milliken, the Speaker, has been told that he has 20 minutes, or however much...

Really, sir, in a sense, because of the feudal kingdom nature of this place, you probably have as much time as you want. But I turn the floor, sir, over to you to elucidate for us your rationale in the letter you sent us about our humble request.

**Hon. Peter Milliken (Speaker of the House of Commons):** You're too kind, Mr. Chairman.

I want to say what a pleasure it is to appear. I usually only get to appear before the procedure and House affairs committee once a year on estimates, so it's a treat to come and meet with members of this committee on this important matter, and I thank you for the invitation.

I'm here to discuss the proposed renaming of this room, a committee room here in the Centre Block. I have to say that through most of my time the procedure and House affairs committee met in this room, and I wonder whether they didn't want to call it the "Procedure Room". Anyway, we'll leave it at that. I'll go on with my reasons for answering your question before.

The idea of acknowledging the contribution of veterans to Canadian society by renaming this room as the Veterans Room was first proposed by this committee in its report tabled on April 18, 2007. The idea was discussed at the regular meeting of the House leaders shortly thereafter, and I was asked for my opinion.

I was then and remain now concerned that this form of recognition will detract from the existence of a number of prestigious memorials dedicated to our veterans throughout Centre Block. To be precise, the building already either embodies or contains many different commemorations of Canada's veterans, and I'd like to describe those.

[Translation]

The Centre Block itself, the premier War memorial of Canada. The central column in Confederation Hall is inscribed with the words:

"...the Parliament and people dedicate this building (...) as a memorial of the deeds of their forefathers and of the valour of those Canadians who in the Great War fought for the liberties of Canada (...)

[English]

The Peace Tower is so named to honour the thousands of Canadian men and women who sacrificed their lives for the country in World War I. Prime Minister Mackenzie King was keen on giving this important memorial a name that would match its role as a symbol of the principles for which Canada fought in the Great War, as well as the high aspirations of the Canadian people.

There is the Peace Tower carillon, which was commissioned and installed by order of Parliament to commemorate the armistice of 1918 and the sacrifice made by Canada during the First World War.

[Translation]

The Memorial Chamber — a memorial to service in the First as well as subsequent wars, for those who survived as well as those who died;

[English]

There is the sculptural frieze entitled *Canada Remembers* in the Hall of Honour, commemorating the 50th anniversary of D-Day, intended to address the apparent absence of any commemoration specifically designed to address the Second World War in the Centre Block.

[Translation]

The Nurses' Memorial in the Hall of Honour, designed to mark the contributions and sacrifices of nursing sisters in the First World War;

[English]

The Auguste Rodin bust of Marianne, simply entitled *La France*, was offered in 1921 to Canada by the French Mission of Gratitude to express to the Canadian nation France's deep gratitude for the heroic part played by our army and Canadian people in the Great War.

And lastly, the Baker monument in the Commons foyer, while dedicated to an individual, has always carried with it a more symbolic meaning. At its unveiling, then Prime Minister King described it thus, and I quote:

It speaks not of one member of parliament...but of the fifty or more members of the two Houses who enlisted at the time...and of the eighteen members of Parliament who lost sons in the Great War. But it speaks of more than this. It speaks of Canadians, approximately 600,000 in number who enlisted for service in the Great War, and above all of the more than 60,000 who gave their lives as the supreme sacrifice of this nation in the cause of the World's freedom.

So it's my view that the designation of an ordinary—and perhaps one even might say lacklustre—committee room as a commemoration in recognition of veterans would not only be an inadequate recognition of that contribution, but it might detract, in my view, from the dignified and symbolic memorials that already adorn this building, to the admiration and gratitude of all visitors, who can freely visit these monuments to our Canadian veterans.

So my initial views on this matter, as communicated to the government House leader and the other House leaders, remain unchanged. In order to continue appropriately to honour Canada's veterans, as parliamentarians we should seek not to create a new monument, but perhaps more effectively and meaningfully to convey the history and importance of the commemorations that are already in this building, which, in my view, do truly honour these people who gave their lives or who served in the wars in which Canada has been involved.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

I would now be happy to take your questions.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm wondering if Ms. O'Brien wishes to add anything to the commentary.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien (Clerk of the House of Commons, House of Commons):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have nothing to add.

**The Chair:** Understood. Fair enough.

Well, we have a list of speakers, and I know I have things I'd like to say, but we'll start off, then, with the Liberal Party of Canada, and Mr. Valley, for seven minutes.

**Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.):** Thank you.

And we were hoping, Ms. O'Brien, you were going to disagree with the Speaker, but we probably realized that wasn't going to happen.

Thank you very much, Speaker. You've been very eloquent and you've explained it very well, from your point of view.

I've had the good fortune to serve on this committee since it started as a stand-alone committee, and I'm very proud to do so. We've had witness to some amazing testimony and some amazing meetings in this room.

I can't say anything to disagree with many of the things you said, but we want a room where the veterans can come and have their story. You used the word "lacklustre". To us, and I think probably to you since you've served here for 20 years, it's one of the best committee meeting rooms to meet in. It's close to the chamber; we can be involved here at all times. Of all the ones we've worked in, this is one of the best. We don't necessarily need the classification to

adorn this room or to get permission to adorn it with something that's important to veterans, but we feel we want a room where the living ones can come and have something to say about their future.

One of the things we've found through our study and crossing Canada is that one of the biggest concerns the men and women in uniform have right is how they're treated as they leave. We think it would just be a mark of recognition for them that they have their own room, they have their own meeting room, they have a place to come that would carry appropriate artwork, if you will. We think they would take ownership of this and they would want to come before us at a very difficult time.

Many of the witnesses we have had have been very emotional. We're dealing at this time with post-traumatic stress disorder. We want some room or some place that they can take some ownership of and feel comfortable in.

So that was the reason for our original request. And while we understand everything you put in your letter and your comments you just made, some of us here don't know how it would take away from, as an example, the Memorial Chamber to have a room the veterans could recognize as their own, as the living, and come to discuss with parliamentarians their thoughts and their wishes and their hopes for the future.

That was the original drive of that. The mover will have to say what he wants after the original motion, that we tried to do this, but we wanted the opportunity. We know you have a lot of experience. We wanted the opportunity to bring you here and share some of that, and I'm sure my colleagues will have some other things.

**The Chair:** Mr. Speaker, do you wish to respond at all?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I'll wait and hear more.

**The Chair:** We'll move on to *Monsieur Perron avec le Bloc québécois, pour sept minutes*.

[*Translation*]

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

How can one possibly broach this subject without being too hurtful or without baring one's soul?. I think of Ms. Migneault seated where you are and crying her heart out over the problems she must live with every day. I think of Louise Richard who felt comfortable enough to share with us her experiences. I was touched by what she said. I think of the young military members suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and from psychological wounds who shared their stories with us one evening over refreshments at an informal gathering of some thirty people. When I think of all these people, I sincerely believe that this is a worthwhile initiative.

We are not here to look out for the welfare of those veterans who unfortunately are no longer with us. We are here to look out for the welfare of those who are living, Mr. Speaker. I do hope — and I will be blunt — that your decision is not based on a desire to reserve this room for the sole use of the whips and leaders committee. I hope that is not the case, Mr. Speaker, otherwise I would be angry.

Mr. Speaker, this room must be renamed the Veterans Room and be decorated accordingly so that young people feel at home here in Parliament.

•(1555)

[English]

**The Chair:** I will now move to the New Democratic Party.

Mr. Stoffer, you have five minutes.

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

Mr. Speaker and Madame O'Brien, thank you very much for coming today.

Sir, I fully respect what you've just said. If, in any way, the motion I presented was to detract at all from any other memorials or representations of veterans that were in this chamber, I would have withdrawn it in a heartbeat, or I would never have presented it.

This is the reason I did what I did—and I know Madame Hinton was on the same committee I was. When David Pratt was the chair of SCONDVA—at that time it was a combination—he asked, in a formal request, if Room 362 could be designated the War Room. This discussion at that time had brought up whether it would detract from the Memorial Chamber or anything else.

Really, the premise of it was that when people went into that room to discuss defence or veterans issues, they would see on the walls some significant history relating to the topics that were at hand.

When veterans came in here, all they really saw were four walls, and it was like this very sterile room to them. When we had that one meeting at night here with those veterans, for those of us who were here it was the most emotional meeting we ever had. I've never sat in a meeting for four hours and not said anything, just listened. It was really quite remarkable. The one thing I felt was lacking through the whole meeting was that this room should say something back to them. What we wanted to do, really the premise, was not to make it a memorial room, not to make it a room of comparative significance to the other memorials that are here. We wanted this to be a working room where veterans and their families, or people who are related to veterans, people who have veterans as a major issue in their lives, would come in and know that this room is significant because it displays the concerns veterans are facing, not just our World War veterans but our modern-day veterans as well and those who would come in down the road.

This is really a nice room to work in, as Mr. Valley said. It's handy, it's close, and it's there. It's easy for people to get to, and it's significant because it's in the same facility as the Memorial Chamber and others. But it was meant to be more of a working room, not a memorial room.

I hope I didn't confuse the issue by saying it would be a room of memory. It would be more or less a working room where people could go and feel comfortable. In other areas, in Valcartier where we were before, when we went into the rooms where soldiers were who are going to be leaving the military and going into the veterans affairs, the rooms all had portraits and paintings all over the place that made them feel comfortable that they were in a room of significance.

Really, that's what the premise was. I agree with my colleague that all we really wanted to do was display some artwork and basically

say the same thing as we did for the War Room and make a room of significance for people when they came in, so they would know this is a room where other people have come in and spoken before, told their stories.

That's basically the premise of it. I respect and understand your point of view on that.

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

Now we'll go to the Conservative Party of Canada. Mrs. Hinton.

**Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** I'd like to begin by saying there are very few people anywhere on the grounds that I have more respect for than the two witnesses today. I have worked closely with both of you. It was an experience I will never forget, and it was an experience that made me grow as a person. So when I make my first comment, I hope you understand that I do it with all due respect.

I don't think that making this room a veterans room would detract in any way, shape, or form from the other wonderful monuments that you've mentioned. I think you'd be the first to realize that we simply can't meet in any of the places you've mentioned. We can't meet in the Peace Tower; we can't meet in the Memorial Chamber; we can't meet outside the Baker monument. So we need a room in which we can welcome veterans from this country to talk about their problems, talk about their issues, and try to find solutions.

I think if you have paid attention at all to this committee you'd have found out that it's probably the most non-partisan committee in the entire House of Commons. We all have one goal, and that goal is veterans.

We'd like a place to which we can bring veterans. You mentioned the humble surroundings that are here. While I've worked with veterans now for close to six years, I will tell you, if I had to find one word to describe veterans, the word would be "humble". So I don't think there will be any offence taken by any veteran who comes in here to tell us what his or her issues are and look for solutions from us, because the surroundings are not ornate and gorgeous. It's a humble room that reflects what I consider the epitome of a veteran: they are very humble.

So I would ask you very respectfully to reconsider, because I think it's important and I think it's necessary that we have a place where veterans will feel comfortable, where we can actually put things on the walls that reflect veterans. I'm more than willing to donate some of my own pieces that I've collected over the years.

I think it's important that we do this, and I again respectfully ask you to reconsider your decision.

•(1600)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Hinton.

We'll now go back over to the Liberal Party of Canada, to Mr. St. Denis, for five minutes.

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Madam Clerk, for being here. I think you're witnessing a full court press.

First of all, for their exceptional arguments in support of naming this room the Veterans Room, I would like to commend my colleagues who have already spoken.

In my opinion, this room is a beautiful room. It's smallish, but it's a beautiful room. After the *Salon de la Francophonie*, the very ornate one off the Senate foyer, I think this is the prettiest room in the Centre Block.

If I take one word from my three colleagues who've already spoken, you can't really associate faces with most of the committees of the House of Commons, important as they are—finance, transportation, environment. There are constituencies—environmental constituencies, railway constituencies, and so on and so forth—but you really can't associate faces. You certainly can with veterans. We're dealing with faces and people.

As my colleagues have already said, it's not about memorializing, because this is very much a place for the living. It's a functional room. I do not see it as our exclusive preserve; we may be more often here than elsewhere, but we understand that with the limitations of space, we're going to share this room with other committees as the schedules require. That having been said, we could still have a home room, so to speak, with that name, and as Mr. Stoffer has said, it could be decorated appropriately to the theme.

I'm not a founding member of the committee, as are Mr. Valley and some others, but certainly since I've been on this committee we've been dealing more with the human side of our parliamentary business. It's not technical, really. I mean that it's not very technical; it's very much the human piece. I have had the good fortune of sponsoring some days of commemoration and of realizing that the more commemoration we have, the stronger it makes the spirit of commemoration; I think that in the same way, having a place for the living to come and share their stories is very important.

You'll make your decision, and we will certainly accept whatever it is, but we wanted to be sure that no stone was left unturned in our efforts to see this room, which is very much a working room, renamed. There would be hardly any expense involved. I'm sure we could get some very appropriate pieces from the art bank, and we've had offers—for example, Ms. Hinton's offer. We would certainly take the advice of whoever the official decorator is for the House of Commons, should this ever happen, to make sure that the name and decoration are very appropriate to the kinds of people we serve as veterans affairs committee members.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we'll go back over to the Bloc Québécois. *Monsieur Gaudet, vous avez cinq minutes.*

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Speaker, I hope you hadn't made up your mind before coming here. Along with my colleagues, I went to Petawawa to meet with veterans in a room similar to this one. It was truly a moving experience for them. They poured their hearts out to us and some even broke down in tears.

I believe a room specifically dedicated to them would give them hope. Every Member of Parliament is trying to help them. For the Speaker of the House of Commons to give us this room would be a very positive initiative.

Thank you.

• (1605)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You still have some time. Go ahead, Monsieur Perron.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** Mr. Speaker, we all respect your position. However, I am confident that I would have the committee's unanimous support to invite you here to the official opening of the Veterans Room.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** All right. We go now to the Conservative Party of Canada and Mr. Shipley.

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

Also, to Mr. Speaker and Ms. O'Brien, thank you for taking the time to be a part of this committee.

I think what you will find, what we have found, and actually what has been a pleasant part of my short tenure here—and I think you could ask Ms. Guarnieri and the past minister, the present minister, and those before—is that this is one of those committees, as mentioned by Ms. Hinton, that it is always a pleasure to come to.

I very much respect the comment you made, Mr. Speaker, that you're pleased to work with members of the standing committee to ensure that the memorial vocation is both reinforced and protected. And we agree with that.

Many of the things I would want to say have been said, but some reinforcement is never out of order, I hope. I believe that this room, following up on the discussion of the people who have been here, clearly is about the present and the future of our veterans, and of their associates who come in to speak on their behalf, who come to this room and to this committee.

We've all been touched by and have worked hard to make reports that come out of this committee go with unanimous support to the House for adoption.

In regard to history and also when we talk, I believe that when they come in, a room has to have something for them—a bit of history, a bit of acknowledgement in the room—so that when they come in they feel some comfort and that it's not just people around the table to listen to them; it acknowledges a little bit about what they have in their present form when they come in.

I don't think any of us are looking for a room that would be decorated to the extent that it would not be usable. In fact, I think it would give encouragement to some committees that used it, as they could reflect that this is a veterans'.... Indeed, this is about what this country is about. That's why we're able to be in this great country of Canada and sitting in a Parliament. It's not just about those who have given their lives and are reflected in the memorial; this is about some of those folks who are still out there right now.

I think it would have a very positive impact, quite honestly, not just on those who are coming in, but on those who go back out and say to their comrades, “You know, we went to the veterans committee, and not only do the committees and this government and this Parliament, in the past, in the future, and in the present, work together, but actually they reflect the significance of what you've done for us in this country.”

We're not asking a lot. I know the names here that are on the committee, and so I just put this forward. There are other rooms that I've had committee meetings in where there are pictures, where there are some commemorations around, and they don't take away from the committee. I really believe, quite honestly, that this would have a very positive impact on those other committees that would be fortunate enough to be able to use this room in their daily routine.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We go back to the Liberal Party of Canada and Mr. Valley.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** Today, Mr. Speaker, we invited you to Room 112-North. It doesn't inspire an awful lot. We think we can do a lot better if we're bringing people in who are helping us plan our future. With all respect, we would like you to reconsider. Please allow us to give it a better name, because 112-North doesn't inspire an awful lot.

**The Chair:** At this stage, sir, I'd like to weigh in, if I may.

A lot of people have made some excellent points.

As for the places you've laid out—the Peace Tower, the D-Day commemoration, the nurses' monument, Marianne by Rodin, and the Baker monument—none of them is a place to meet. When you meet veterans who have post-traumatic stress disorder or who have lost limbs, etc., they're looking, I think, for some place that gives them a sense of comfort and familiarity.

Respectfully, sir, we would do everything possible to tastefully decorate it. I don't think you'd find anything untoward. When we visited Valcartier, they had a suit of armour up. When we visited Petawawa, they had the landscapes they had fought over. It's things of that order, sir.

● (1610)

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** In response, there are two points I'd make to you.

First, if we're going to start naming the committee rooms after committees.... We have none at the moment except the Railway Room, and there's no longer a railway committee. That name was given to it because that was the only committee that used it when it was built, and it stuck. It's not for any other reason. In fact, as you know, it's often referred to as Room 253-D, or whatever it is, and often notices come with that on them, and not the Railway Room. None of the other committee rooms have names that I'm aware of. If we name one, the pressure's going to be on us to name a bunch. Sooner or later, another committee is going to come forward and say, “This should be the Indian Affairs Committee Room”, or “This should be the Finance Committee Room”, and we're going to have names applied, and they're going to ask for the rooms to be set up in ways they want, that are specific to what they're doing.

That's number one, and that causes me some concern because we don't have enough committee rooms for all 20 committees we have. If we're going to choose which ones get names and which ones don't and which committees get a committee room named for them and which don't, it's going to create considerable difficulty, in my view, within the House.

The second thing is that if you designate the room as “this” committee, what happens if another committee comes in here and meets, and you can't get a meeting? You'd have to have your meeting somewhere else. This must happen from time to time. I know the procedure and House affairs committee recently had a filibuster that I came in here for. I saw that it was going on. If you were supposed to have had a meeting that day here, you wouldn't have had it. This must happen.

Designating one room for one committee has not been the practice of this House as long as I've been here, and I think for a very long time before that. Committees moved around and booked a room where there was one free and had their meeting there. Yes, it might be nice to say that one committee over all others has precedence in a particular room, but if you got that, you'd be the only one that would have that precedence. It would make it extremely difficult for scheduling purposes if you had a meeting scheduled for here and the other committee had to adjourn and get out because you take precedence.

You can see this creates a series of problems, in my view, for House administration that may seem minor compared with the impact you're seeking to have by doing this. I'm not speaking disrespectfully in any way about your suggestions or about what the veterans have done for Canada; don't misunderstand me. But it will create difficulties in administrative matters relating to committee meetings and where they take place and which committee takes precedence, and so on, which can create difficulties for us.

[*Translation*]

As I said at the outset, a number of years ago, when I chaired the procedure and House affairs committee, we held all of our meetings in this room, as I recall. I was not aware of any other committees holding their meetings here.

[*English*]

I thought we were the only ones who used the room, but it never occurred to me that we would name it the “Procedure Room” or designate it as a place where only we could meet, or anything like that. So I'm naturally very skeptical of a change that allows one committee to do things differently from others. For that reason, I ask you to look at it from that perspective.

Maybe you can avoid naming it. Maybe you can simply ask that the room be decorated in a way that's suitable, and that might work. If we start naming rooms or setting them up for one purpose only and not for others—because this room is used not just for committee meetings; there are other events that take place in this room, and I've been to receptions in here and so on—it's going to make it more difficult to operate, given the limited space we have available on Parliament Hill for committee work.

I ask you to bear that in mind in your considerations.

•(1615)

**The Chair:** Mr. Speaker, we have more people on the list, but I'd just like to say that I don't think it was really our intention to take precedence over any other committee. I think we just wanted to decorate it appropriately for the people we normally have testifying with us.

We'll go over to Mr. Stoffer and the NDP.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Maybe Madam O'Brien can explain. How did Room 362 get its designation? It's called the War Room, and Mr. Pratt has signed a plaque on the wall. He put a certificate there, along with the artwork. I'm not saying that because they got one, we should have one. We're certainly not asking to take precedence over this room. Obviously if there's a committee here and they're going to go all day, we would have to go somewhere else.

But one of the advantages of having it as the Veterans Room is this. Our committee listens to some pretty dramatic testimony, and I only wish we could share it with all Canadians at the same time. But when other MPs come in here—I think a lot of MPs are quite jealous about the way this committee works, to be honest with you, compared to some of their committees—and see what's on the walls, they may reflect upon the fact that, as Mr. Shipley said, it's not we who gave this, it was our veterans who gave it. It would enhance the discussions, I hope.

Again, I can appreciate the confusion it may cause in terms of who gets what in terms of precedence of the rooms, but I don't think that's our intent. If we had to go somewhere else, we would. People who come in here would know this is a veterans room and it has meaning. Maybe they will understand and conduct themselves in an appropriate manner. I know when veterans come in here, if they see.... When you see defence officials go into Room 362, they know it's a room specifically for them and they like it. So I think it would be very appropriate to have the same for veterans.

That's my opinion. I respect your view as well, but if you can answer the War Room designation, it would be great.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** I'm going to have to go back into the archives to find out more about it. My understanding is that you're correct, the Minister of Defence at the time took it upon himself to decide he was going to call that room the War Room. That was never sanctioned in any way, though it does have that plaque on it.

I think one of the difficulties we run into is that there isn't a clear process for how these things get done. I think one of the problems we're facing is that the architectural history of the building is not well understood. The entire building is dedicated to veterans, not just those who died, but those who served and who served recently.

I hear what members are saying, and clearly the meetings with these very brave men and women have had a great emotional impact.

[*Translation*]

I appreciate that you want to honour veterans by having a room dedicated specifically to them. However, as the chair was saying, the problem is that no one room is reserved for the sole use of one single committee. This request came out of the blue. The fact is that the procedure committee, the Board of Internal Economy and other committees meet in this room.

On listening to you, I can understand why veterans are so at ease speaking with you. It has nothing to do with the physical space. It has everything to do with the fact that you listen to them.

[*English*]

I understand your wish to have a room that would be more reflective of their experience. I guess the difficulty I have is the same as the Speaker has described, which is that since no rooms are really dedicated to one committee, it seems to me to be a bit misdirected, if you will, in terms of a way of honouring the veterans.

I suspect the veterans who come before you feel they are being listened to and have found a safe place—the land, if you will—because of your openness to them. I think the surroundings are the surroundings, but I don't think that's the key element.

•(1620)

**The Chair:** Now we go to Mr. Cannan.

**Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to our witnesses.

I apologize that I missed the preamble, as I was sitting in on the ethics committee. I can guarantee you they won't have to worry about naming a room after that committee.

If we do decide to name this the Veterans Room, we need to find some room in our budget for the HVAC system and fix it as well.

But seriously, I hear your concerns and understand the predicament you're in. In line with what my honourable colleague Betty Hinton and the chair mentioned, this isn't a meeting place. When I was reflecting on our first discussion of this, I was thinking it should be the centre of the Parliament; the biggest room in this building should be named after the veterans. Without them, as was alluded to, we wouldn't have the freedom we have, the democracy, and the wonderful country that we call Canada.

Just recently, last week, I was reading a survey. It was a national poll, and it said that veterans are concerned that by the year 2035 Canadians will forget about them. That's a short 27 years away. As you know, we only have one survivor of World War I, and we need to not only honour and respect, but remember our veterans.

I appreciate the offer to decorate and I also hear what you're saying about setting that precedent. But I believe that, to use that argument, nothing would ever get accomplished. We have to look at each application on its own merits, and this would be significant, in my mind, just to recognize the vets. As we know, nothing is free; there's a cost to freedom. As Minister Thompson has said many times, nothing unites us more than our veterans. So I think this is a great opportunity to do both: to honour and respect and to remember our veterans.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** All right.

Next is Monsieur Perron of the Bloc Québécois.



[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** Ms. O'Brien, Mr. Speaker, I believe you have never attended a meeting of veterans, particularly of young veterans. These young veterans who have lost an arm or a leg or who have psychological problems, are no longer fit for active duty. The forces have rejected them and have no further use for them. These young people who are 20, 22 and 24 years old are fighting to receive services and they feel like they have been rejected by Veterans Affairs and by the politicians who are not doing their job.

For several years now, Betty, Roger and I have been working to make progress in certain areas and reach out to these veterans. For example, there was no talking to Louise Richard initially. However, she has started to come around and to enjoy attending meetings of the veterans affairs committee.

It is extremely important, Madam, to dedicate a room to veterans, for their welfare, their healing and their reintegration into society. The committee heard from some psychologists who told us that it was critically important to reach out to veterans. This is one way for us to do that. I never thought that I would need to argue my point so strongly, but I believe in this initiative and I feel very deeply for these young veterans.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Now we go over to Mr. St. Denis.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I don't think any of us wants, although it might appear so, to put you in a bad spot.

Just to clarify, leaving aside for the moment the official naming part of it, if the request came from the committee via the chair to borrow some art pieces to decorate the room, and just that for now, and if the room was—basically unofficially and by us, if nobody else—nicknamed the Veterans Room, but there was nothing official about the naming part, yet in informal practice it became that; and if over time it stuck, well, so be it. If over time it didn't stick, so be it. The only decision on your part, Mr. Speaker, would be to consider whether some appropriate art pieces could be put in here.

That's an attempt to slice the onion a little thinner. I don't mean to get ahead or behind any of my colleagues here, but sensing a bit of where this is going, I'm just wondering about that.

•(1625)

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I don't see any problem with putting artwork up in here. That happens in rooms around the chamber, as you know. Given the expressed interest, I think the custodian can come up with things that are in storage and hang them in here.

**The Chair:** Mr. Sweet.

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The nature of the conversation has prompted me to make a request. When Speaker Milliken was making his point on logistics, which is of course one of the concerns he has in the parliamentary precinct, he felt compelled to couch his words in the fact that he did not want to have his words characterized as derogatory to veterans in any way, shape, or form. It brought to mind that sometimes we debate some very emotional, heartfelt things at this committee.

It should almost be that at the beginning of every meeting you, the chair, would have a preamble to state that everybody has honourable and solemn intentions no matter what the tenor of the debate is, because I think that to try to play in intentions because someone agrees or disagrees with you, particularly here at the veterans affairs committee.... All of us are here primarily because we have a deep, heartfelt dedication and great honour and respect for the veterans who have served and continue to serve now.

I just want to make sure I put that out there for any future debate. As I said, I would even hope we would consider having you give a preamble at the beginning of every meeting to say that all debate is for the benefit of veterans, no matter how we may disagree in practice or process.

I would like to express to the committee what I have expressed to this committee before. I have some concerns about traditions that started many years ago that are very valuable. In fact, they go down to the very foundations of the recognition of this country. It should be a warning to us. The concerns Mr. Cannan mentioned about veterans' being concerned are, to a degree, because some of the traditions we have valued have been diminished.

Madam O'Brien just mentioned the lack of clarity many people have on the architecture of this building, that they are unaware that the entire building is pretty much a memorial to those who have either laid down their lives or decided they would make that sacrifice. In fact, on the previous building the tower was called the Victoria Tower, not the Peace Tower. It was named after Queen Victoria. It was only after this country sent 10% of its male population into World War I, and 10% of that population never came home, and with the reconstruction of the Centre Block as a free-standing structure—the Peace Tower is a separate piece of architecture—that they said this tower would be dedicated to those who fight for peace. The entire structure was erected in that memory. Of course, the Memorial Chamber is the apex, the focal point, of that structure, with all the books of remembrance to all those who paid the ultimate sacrifice—no greater love has any man than to lay down his life for his friends. In these days, that would be any man or woman who would lay down their life for their friends or fellow citizens.

So with the list that the Speaker mentioned of great memorials that are here, I would not want to have any practice of this committee diminish them. Before Madam O'Brien mentioned it, I wrote these words as a note to myself. I'll read them verbatim, so you'll understand that I had this thought prior: "Accommodation and hope that veterans feel and the safe place that they need will be more determined by our attitude, work, and behaviour than any room."

•(1630)

I think one of the reasons we've had the meetings we've had and heard some of the extraordinary testimony is that people have come in here and felt a unity of purpose, although there are different partisan stripes here. I think they found a place where they feel there's absolute trust in their testimony when they give it. I think that is the kind of solemn bond we should have here to make sure that every day when we come to this door we're prepared to check our partisan intentions and attitudes and make sure that every practice we have, whether we agree or not, is for the great and best outcome and benefit of our veterans—and of course, as Mr. Stoffer often reminds us, their families. We want all our work to create for them the best outcome that will do some justice to the sacrifice that all Canadians feel they have made.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to say that I feel emotional and strong about this issue. At the same time, I would not want to have this room named and have a meeting that couldn't take place, or have even one witness come here on our account and say we had a veterans room but they couldn't testify in it. Logistically, that will happen. We're not the only new committee. The subcommittee for human rights wants to be a stand-alone committee, and that will create another complexity in meeting rooms. This is a brand new committee. It used to be a defence subcommittee. Who knows what the amount will be later?

I think a heartfelt dedication by all of us to do the best, greatest, most dedicated work for veterans would be far greater than any room we name for them.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Hinton.

**Mrs. Betty Hinton:** I think that my colleague said whatever I was about to say. I was going to ask you if there had ever been a problem with having other meetings in the Railway Room once it was no longer used for the railways. But I think that's redundant right now.

I trust your judgment, and I have for quite a long time. I will leave you with the thoughts of this committee and let you make a decision and get back to us.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** We're quite happy to look at this. I am going to see if we can come up with some things from our collection. I know the House has a fair bit of material in storage that is not on display, and I know this from decorating my office.

I would be more than happy to come up with some suggestions for things that might be useful for the purpose you have in mind for this room. I think I'm safe in saying that I can't see the other committees objecting to having some art hanging on the walls. It would make it a room that more suits your purposes, which I'm keen to do.

It's been suggested that you apply names to it. If names start sticking for some reason, fine. But who knows how that would play out?

This happened, in my view, with the Railway Room, and that's all I've been able to find out in reviewing the history of it. Many of the other rooms were named specifically. There is the Commonwealth Room, for example. The Reading Room was a reading room, of course, and it was that when I first came here. The New Zealand Room in the restaurant was given that name because the Parliament in New Zealand donated the wood panelling, which was originally

intended for the Prime Minister's Office but, because there wasn't enough, wound up in the New Zealand Room.

I guess we're on the record, and I can't tell that other story.

The Confederation Room, Room 200, was changed around 1964. The Speaker pushed for a change and got agreement to carry through and to give it a name. It was previously just Room 200. It was fixed up in the early 1960s, and when it was finished, the room was renamed. You notice it's not named as a committee room, but it is occasionally used as one.

•(1635)

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** It's known as Room 200 much more than it is known as the Confederation Room. I discovered it was called the Confederation Room when I was reading briefing notes.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** If we can go with something like that, we'll come back to you with some suggestions for art. We'll give it a try, and once it's in here we'll see what happens.

**The Chair:** I think it's a good step in the right direction.

I believe Mr. Shipley had something he wanted to add.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I want to thank you.

And I also want to thank my colleague, who often strikes a sense of commonality and of reality, which I appreciate very much. And I think quite honestly the issue is more that if we have something when we're here that reflects something of our past and our present and our future; it's a great tribute. So I, for one, would very much appreciate that consideration before the naming of it.

There are some realities that come about. We do have to remember that this is a changing world and we're a part of that change. Some of the deep history my colleague has relayed to us is not likely well known by the majority of people. And maybe that is something, in another venue and not because of this discussion, that somehow needs to be relayed more. You can pick up all the pamphlets, which I did today because I have a friend from South Africa who has a deep interest, but I can tell you that I don't think any of that history is in them. I'll take a peek at it.

We likely should, because thousands upon thousands of people go through every day and pick those things up. I think it would be a worthwhile thought to consider.

So I do appreciate your time. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** With that, committee members, unless there is somebody else who wishes to add anything, I would like to extend, on behalf of our committee, a thank you to you for your appearance today, sir. We may have some other things to deal with, but I humbly thank you for your time with us and for your consideration and for the consideration of art.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Thank you.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_
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- (1640)

**The Chair:** There are a couple of things I would like to apprise you of.

First, I mentioned at the beginning of the meeting—but not everybody was here so I'm just saying it again—that our motion to travel has been held up along with other motions to travel and there is a negotiation going on. We hope to hear word about that.

If we don't get the motion to travel approved, there is nothing stopping us from going, but we'll just need to make private arrangements in order to get to the cemetery.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** Would 500 be too much?

**The Chair:** I think ours was the most reasonable by a long stretch. I think there are others for significantly more zeros that are holding this up. I'm not going to go into any great detail. It's out of my hands.

Anyhow, we can probably make arrangements through cabs or something like that. I can certainly take probably three or four people with me and then whatever other arrangements are made.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** I can volunteer a cab too.

**The Chair:** Okay, there we go, so we've got a couple of volunteers here.

As well, just to let you know, we have the Minister of Veterans Affairs for New Zealand. Is that the actual minister himself? Lovely. That's great. He is coming on Tuesday, June 17. Unfortunately, though, because it is the actual minister, we realize their schedules are kind of crazy. Oh, I see it's a video conference with him. It will be done at 4 p.m., so it'll jog our committee time slightly, but we're getting it straight from the horse's mouth.

**A voice:** There's a time difference.

**The Chair:** Yes, of course. And then of course on Thursday, June 19, we have the French defence attaché.

I think we'll leave it at that and consider our job well done for today.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I have just one other thing—and I'm sorry, Brent, I may have missed it. But the Speaker and Audrey had spoken about art. Just for clarification, should we be sending a letter of request to them, or are they just going to take it from the blues today?

**The Chair:** The Clerk has offered that she'll follow up with them about that. I sense there is every good intent to—

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Oh, sure. I just wanted to follow up on it.

**The Chair:** Now, committee members, I think it's part of our responsibility to make suggestions, pool them, and come together with some consensus on what we approve.

With that, then, the meeting is adjourned.





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