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Chair

Mr. David Sweet

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• (1645)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC)): Ladies and gentlemen, we are beginning our twentieth meeting of the veterans affairs committee. We're starting substantially late because of the votes, so we want to get going as quickly as possible.

I understand that in his opening comments Mr. Hillier would also like to make some comments referring to our previous meeting.

Mr. Hillier, the floor is yours.

Mr. Keith Hillier (Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery and Commemoration, Department of Veterans Affairs): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to report back on a couple of items that were raised and also to provide a clarification to this committee. After reviewing the transcript, and I refer particularly to an exchange, Mr. Chair, that you and I had towards the end of the meeting, I'd like to clarify. There seemed to be some question around reports and observation papers and such things. I would like to put on the record a clarification.

First of all, as I noted in response to your question, the ombudsman contacted me in the vicinity of the late summer or fall, and that was via telephone. During the fall months, the department was working on an analysis, or what one might call a decision/policy paper, with respect to homelessness. At that time, the communication between me and the ombudsman was by phone. As things developed, there were ongoing discussions between the ombudsman's staff, as I understand, and staff of the department. In fact, it was in February 2009 that the ombudsman submitted a paper to the department through the policy arm of the department, and the department provided a response to the ombudsman in March.

I want to clarify, just for greater certainty, that among the numbers of papers we have received from the ombudsman we received a paper with respect to exceptional incapacity, the SISIP, occupational stress injuries, and homelessness, and a report that the ombudsman has referred to on funerals and burials. When you posed the questions to me, I was responding on the basis of when I became involved and of what had been submitted to me. I wanted to clarify with respect to that.

With respect to the issue of the number of calls being handed off to the department, I went back to my staff. It's very difficult to give any number—I don't want to mislead the committee, Mr. Chairman—because there are no statistics kept. These calls are ongoing on what I would call a rather informal basis. The ombudsman's staff

have the phone directory of the staff. They have the names of the particular experts.

The Chair: These are the hot transfers?

Mr. Keith Hillier: That's right.

The Chair: Mr. Andrews, this was your question.

Mr. Keith Hillier: I went back to my staff and asked whether we could come up with some estimate of the number of calls that might be transferred, i.e., of hot calls from the ombudsman.

It's virtually impossible to give a number, because the ombudsman's staff, as I testified, has complete access to the telephone directory of the department and of the experts. I can confirm the number of 375 calls that we know we responded to in a more official capacity, but if I were to give a number here, it would be no more than a guesstimate. I think that's probably not particularly useful to members.

These are occurring on an ongoing basis. That was the whole premise, that the ombudsman has access to the full staff of the department. To put it in perspective, we have about 125 agents who operate through our national call centre alone and about another 75 people who work in our operations and approval. It wouldn't be a good number, and I'd rather say I don't have a statistic than provide a number that in fact may be off-base.

With respect to the issue of “no fixed address”, I went back and we had a discussion about it. It's not specifically coded. To determine how many we have, we would have to manually go through the 220,000 on the database. The triggers are such things as that various addresses are known to the area counsellors to be, for example, missions and/or residences. In that regard, I can tell you that in some cases, because of the exceptional circumstances of some veterans, their cheques.... We try to send them through direct deposit, but in a very small number of cases, the cheques are delivered to the district office, and the client will come in to the district office to pick them up. We usually try to do that as we're helping to bridge them. In some cases, because of their circumstances, they're not able to open an account in a bank, as you and I would know it.

I wanted, Mr. Chairman, first, to provide a clarification so that the sequence of events was clear, and second, to provide the statistics that had been requested at the last meeting.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Hillier.

I don't want to presuppose what the committee would find in a report, but just to give you a heads up, this is probably a piece of data that should be collected. Having the number of those who might be of no fixed address would, I think, be important.

Do you have some opening remarks on the report on plans and priorities, Mr. Hillier? Mr. Herbert has? Okay.

Mr. Ron Herbert (Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services Branch, Department of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Chair, I know I speak for my colleagues here today when I thank you for the opportunity to discuss Veterans Affairs Canada's strategic direction over the next few years.

Members of this committee have spent a great deal of time with our staff, both here in committee meetings and in Charlottetown, to learn about our department, the challenges we face, and the services we offer. I think it has been valuable for both you and our department as we work towards a common goal of providing the best possible programs and services to the men and women who have served our country.

Today we'll discuss those challenges and how we plan to meet them with programs and services that respond to the changing needs of our veterans today and into the future. We'll talk about our key priorities and our plan of action. I hope to keep my remarks fairly brief so that we have plenty of time to respond to any questions you may have.

I consider myself very fortunate, Mr. Chair, to work for a department with a truly noble *raison d'être*. Simply put, Veterans Affairs Canada exists to repay the nation's debt of gratitude to those whose legacy is the peace and security we continue to enjoy as Canadians. It is a clear, compelling mandate for the 4,000-plus employees who serve our portfolio.

• (1650)

[Translation]

VAC extends programs and services to traditional veterans as well as to modern veterans, wherever and whenever they need them, at every stage of their lives.

[English]

From the recent-serving CF member taking the difficult transition to civilian life after gruelling deployments in Afghanistan, or the injured reservist needing rehabilitation and support, to the Second World War veteran who needs residential care, or the surviving elderly spouse who needs assistance to remain at home, VAC has developed programs that are as diverse as the clientele we serve. The department continues to evolve to meet the new challenges faced by our returning veterans and their families.

Mr. Chair, Canadians have deep respect for the role that Canada's veterans have played in forging our nation and for the contributions of our men and women who serve today. Veterans Affairs Canada works with veterans' organizations, community groups, and citizens to remember our country's heroes through remembrance ceremonies and commemorative events both in Canada and on the world stage.

In 2007-08, Veterans Affairs Canada broadcast a remembrance vignette during Veterans' Week. Again this year, as part of a whole-of-government approach to the 2009 remembrance campaign, the

department will lead the Government of Canada in calling Canadians to action, remembering and honouring the sacrifices and contributions of our traditional and modern-day veterans.

[Translation]

Our employees are our greatest strength. These people are committed to their work, they are proud of it and they have respect for all Canadian veterans. I know that over the past months, committee members met some of our employees and they can bear witness to the commitment with which we carry out Canada's obligations toward our veterans.

[English]

Mr. Chair, Veterans Affairs Canada is at a crossroads. Along with the decline in the number of traditional veterans requiring care, there are increasing numbers of modern-day veterans with varied care and support needs. As we work to provide effective programs and services for our veterans, RCMP, and other clients, we find ourselves straddling the past and the future.

Our traditional veterans face new challenges with age. Our residential care and our in-home assistance and health care programs are helping provide veterans and their families with the care they need to live out their lives with respect, comfort, dignity, and honour.

Our modern-day veterans have access to programs that focus on injury rehabilitation, job placement, help with occupational stress, and benefits and services that provide the support they need. Through the new veterans charter, we will continue to find new ways to help these heroes return to their homes, communities, and civilian life with care and recognition tailored to their unique needs.

Our department continues to support families. Families are encouraged to participate along with the CF member in a transition interview. Individual family counselling is available through the VAC assistance line, one of eight operational stress injury clinics we currently have open, or the operational stress injury social support program.

In addition to group health insurance, families may qualify for the suite of new veterans charter programs, including vocational assistance and protection from earnings loss, if the CF member is unable to participate.

Mr. Chair, I'll stop here and ask whether you would like me to take you through the deck—I know members have the deck—or you would like to just move to questions.

The Chair: I think we'll move to questions right now. If members have specific questions around them, you can release an in-depth portion of the deck.

Mr. Gaudet has already indicated that we only have really 35 minutes. So we'll go with five minutes as an initial round, and then we'll see where we stand after that. We might have to go to one single question after that.

For the Liberal Party, we have Mr. Andrews for five minutes, please.

•(1655)

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Thank you very much for coming in again today and for your dedication to the department.

I have a couple of questions on some differences between what you've got in the deck and what our analysts have provided us on some of the numbers on the estimates.

First, in the table that our analyst has provided us, which comes from the expenditures and the main estimates, there was no figure there for the internal services for 2008-09. Then in 2009-10 there is a figure of \$82 million. That's the same as on program activity number five. I was wondering why we didn't see it in 2008-09 and now it's there in 2009-10.

Mr. Ron Herbert: In 2008-09 the amount for internal services was apportioned across all of the programs. This is the first year it has been broken out as a separate item. That was really for transparency in terms of what are the costs of the overhead programs like finance, human resources, communications, etc. In the past it was actually apportioned; this year it's a separate number.

Mr. Scott Andrews: So you're not spending any more on it, it's an accounting device.

Mr. Ron Herbert: It's the way it's being displayed, a display change.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Okay, that's fair enough. That answers that question.

To the Remembrance Day part on strategic outcome, number two. Again the main estimates show that \$50.6 million for last year, 2008-09, and this year it's \$44.8 million. You've shown it on your deck as \$44.8 million across the board. Is it a decrease in remembrance services?

Mr. Ron Herbert: Actually, there is a reduction from last year to this year. Additional moneys were carried over from the 2007-08 fiscal year that were allocated to remembrance programming last year. It was about \$1.8 million for the pilgrimage that went to Korea. There were some projects that had not been finished the previous year and the moneys were carried forward. It was moneys that were carried forward to last year. That work is finished, and it's not necessary this year. So yes, there is a reduction, but it is a planned reduction based on carryover costs from 2007-08.

Mr. Scott Andrews: There's only that one example you gave. Is there anything else there that was part of the carryover?

Mr. Ron Herbert: Yes, the pilgrimage, there were projects. There was the Green Park project in London. There was work at Vimy on the septic tanks, a septic system that was put in. There were some moneys received from Heritage. Let me see, what else do we have? The Korean website work that was done. There was \$1 million there and \$1.8 million on the pilgrimage, plus some other small numbers, which totalled pretty close to \$3.2 million that I have here.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Our records show the difference of \$6.2 million.

Mr. Ron Herbert: Part of the difference as well would be the numbers that are shown for forecasted spending. The RPP would have taken out the amounts for the internal services on this document and they would be shown on item number five for last year, I believe. If we move and look at it, yes, it shows \$88.5 million.

Although it wasn't in the main estimate numbers, it has been broken in the RPP. There's about a \$2 million difference there as well that would have been moved over to internal services.

Mr. Scott Andrews: On to the strategic outcome, number three slide, \$11.2 million. Again 2008-09, Veterans Review and Appeal Board was \$13.6 million, and your deck is showing \$11.2 million. That's a difference of \$2.4 million.

Mr. Ron Herbert: I really can't speak to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. The chairman of the board would have to speak to those numbers. I can speak for the department numbers but not for the board or for the ombudsman.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Fair enough.

On to the overview of the five operational stress injury clinics that were announced in the 2007 budget. You are moving forward with five more that are anticipated to be opening soon. Are we still on target for that? Where are we on that spending?

•(1700)

Mr. Keith Hillier: Yes, the money was set aside, and there have been various announcements. Some of the clinics have been opened and some will be opened very soon. I know that the minister has announced various dates, and we are on schedule to meet those commitments.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hillier and Mr. Andrews.

Monsieur Gaudet, pour cinq minutes, s'il vous plaît.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Herbert, for 2008-2009, we are discussing support for homeless veterans. I would like to know whether any funds have been allocated to this purpose for 2009-2010.

Mr. Keith Hillier: When you refer to homeless veterans, I think that you are referring to the English term

[English]

“the homeless”.

There is no special program, there's no special fund. All of our programs are open to all veterans, homeless or not, and there is no money specifically earmarked to deal with a homeless program.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Do you know how many veterans there are in Quebec?

[English]

Mr. Keith Hillier: I'm just trying to remember what the number would be. I'm talking about clients, so of the 225,000, it would probably be around 40,000 in Quebec. That would be a ballpark number.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I would like you to send me that information.

Mr. Keith Hillier: Yes, we can give you the exact number.

Mr. Roger Gaudet: All right.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I have just one brief supplementary question.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Gaudet, that's nine minutes, and we're really limited here.

Mr. Julian, I know that you're generally a quick study, but you just got here. Do you want to take your five minutes now, or do you want to go to the Conservatives and then back to you so you can prepare?

• (1710)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): I'm prepared. I may be asking a question that has already been asked.

The Chair: For five minutes, go ahead. You can ask any question you like, sir.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I apologize. We've been handing off the baton today. Our regular Veterans Affairs critic, Peter Stoffer, is not available.

What interests me when I look at the strategic outcomes is this. I can perhaps understand that veterans' compensation and financial support is less through 2011-12 than it is in 2009-10 because of the unfortunate loss of many of our veterans, but what I don't understand is that we see a reduction in veterans' health care costs as well. There is strategic outcome number one. In real terms, even for Canada Remembers, essentially there is a loss of expenditure ability or expenses on those programs over the three-year period. The Veterans Review and Appeal Board, also in real terms...because if we have a fixed amount, of course, over three years inflation erodes that same amount. For the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman there is also an erosion in real terms, and then for the Internal Services as well we see a reduction both in absolute and in real terms.

So I see the five strategic outcomes, and in every single case there are fewer funds available two years from now than in fiscal year 2009-10. That's a matter of some concern. Obviously Canadians support our veterans. We're concerned about services to our veterans, and yet there's a cutback in every sector.

Is that something you've already explained, and could you explain it to me?

Mr. Ron Herbert: No, it's not something we explained to this point.

Programs that are direct benefits to clients are indexed every year at 3%. So the numbers you see here, although they may look as if they've flatlined—for instance, health care and the re-establishments—have been indexed, and if it weren't for that indexing, they would be lower. And they would be lower because of the decline in the veteran population.

So the number of veterans is going down. We're losing roughly 20,000 veterans per year of the World War II and Korean War veterans. So we're losing them at a very fast pace, but because the numbers had been indexed, the program costs are indexed, the actual expenditures are staying relatively constant.

Mr. Peter Julian: Can I just do a supplementary on that particular question, for veterans' health care?

Are expanded services available? If we are losing, tragically, that number of veterans every year, there is still a reduction in the overall budget, but does that mean that those funds are being transferred to provide additional health care services?

Mr. Ron Herbert: In many cases, yes, because of the veterans' age, the demands for services are much greater, and if veterans present with a health care need and are eligible based on the program, they will get those services. As we know, in the last two years of life, the costs of health care are exponentially higher than they are in the earlier years.

So absolutely, more services are being provided for these older veterans in their later years.

Mr. Darragh Mogan: I may add, Ron, that these are statutory programs, so if the demand goes down...but if the demand goes up, it is met. So that's one thing to bear in mind.

The other is that if in any one period of time the money allocated to veterans' programs or corrections or whatever isn't used, it goes back into the general revenue and it's not, at least technically, available to be reused unless cabinet decides that's what should happen. The advantage of a statutory program is that if the demand were to go down like this and then go back up, there's a guarantee the resources will go up with the increased demand.

Mr. Peter Julian: Can you run through the other strategic outcome budgetary allotments, please?

Mr. Ron Herbert: For the others, the amounts are not indexed to inflation, and that is the way all government programming is done. There may be some erosion, but in most cases, we're fairly nimble on our feet and are able to continue to provide the same level of service by doing things a little differently, a little more smartly. The remembrance programming, I would say, has year over year probably been one of the prides of the department in terms of what we've been able to do with the funds we've had.

So we work smarter, but we're not getting any additional money. You're correct.

Mr. Peter Julian: The moneys will be less.

Mr. Ron Herbert: In real terms they will be less. Exactly, yes.

Mr. Peter Julian: So do you have any idea, at this point, for Canada Remembers, what you would cut back in 2011-12?

• (1715)

Mr. Keith Hillier: I can speak to that. There are actually a number of things I think are important to get on the table there, because another member has raised the question.

As the program owner of Canada Remembers, I can assure you there has been no reduction in those services. The discussion that went on earlier at this committee was really around what I will call accounting entries. You would have capital projects like Vimy; we were moving money around to base the project. We had the Vimy ceremony, etc. But in real terms, there has been no reduction in the number of people we have working in Canada Remembers programs from coast to coast in this country.

In fact, as we look forward to the future, some of the areas where we see a saving are in really getting out of the paper business and getting into the electronic business. We feel that, as we become electronic, there are savings to be had by basically developing everything for an Internet-based format, so that everything is available on the web. Those people who want the material can download it, or if they don't want to download it, they can call our 1-800 number and we'd be happy to send them a copy of the material that's on the site.

We are basically not reducing the program, but we're looking at—as my colleague has mentioned—what I would call a smarter delivery and also changing to the reality of our client out there, who is much more electronic-media-centric as opposed to paper-centric.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hillier. Thank you, Mr. Julian.

We'll now go on to Mr. McColeman for five minutes.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Thank you again, gentlemen, for coming here today and being patient with our getting here.

Certainly I commend you on your fiscal management, and in fact, as a fiscal conservative and business owner for my whole life, I know there are always better ways to do things, and you can improve at all times. The thinking that just because you add more money means you provide more is totally not in my vocabulary of how you operate efficiently and effectively. So thank you for doing a fine job in dealing with this and also delivering—as we saw when we were in Charlottetown—the superb service to our veterans, making sure no one falls between the cracks and everyone gets the level of service you're committed to.

My question really revolves around the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman, because as you know, we've talked about this in past meetings recently. I just want to know what effects the creation of the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman may have in terms of the goals as you have outlined them. Has that office had any effect on these objectives?

Mr. Keith Hillier: I'll take that question. Certainly the ombudsman has been in place for a very short period of time. At this point in time, the goals and strategic outcomes you see there are very department-centric. As you see, there is a separate outcome for the ombudsman, which is his independent outcome, and also for the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, which is his separate outcome.

As the ombudsman's office is around for a longer period of time—it has only been around for a short period of time—and as they identify systemic issues, then one might expect to see the results of his inputs, his systemic reviews, having an impact. But at this point in time, given the short period of time, if you look at when this document was actually created—it's for this current fiscal year—you'll see it was actually drafted late in the last fiscal year, the last quarter. It's an early 2009-based document. The ombudsman's office would have only been in place for about 14 months at that point in time.

What you're seeing is the department's view of where we see the strategic issues.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Thank you for that.

In your report, you also mentioned that the Afghanistan mission has reached a high operational tempo, the highest since the Korean conflict. As such, our men and women in uniform returning from Afghanistan are at great risk of psychiatric conditions as well as physical conditions. Will the existing and soon-to-be-opened OSI clinics be sufficient to provide adequate services to the veterans, traditional and modern veterans?

Mr. Keith Hillier: The short answer is yes. There are a number that have been operating for some time. There are number that have been identified. As the minister has often said, there's never too much you can do for a veteran. In a perfect world, it might be nice to have one in every town and every community from coast to coast in the country, but there's a certain pragmatism to that. In order to have one of these clinics, you actually have to have professionals who are available to staff them.

I feel we have to look at it on a broader basis. It's not just the OSISS clinics; it's the peer support and the other services. It's all part of an integral network, and I feel confident we can provide the services we need both to modern-day veterans and to the traditional veterans. It's very important to point out that many of the people who are going to these clinics are veterans of the Second World War and veterans of the Korean War. It is not just the modern-day veterans who are the clients of these clinics.

• (1720)

Mr. Phil McColeman: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McColeman.

We have 10 minutes left. I will follow the traditional rotation—and I'll have to be pretty disciplined on the time for answers, as well. So we will go to the Liberal Party for a two-minute round, if you have any more questions.

Mr. Scott Andrews: I have just one question. The government has announced a review of all assets as part of its budget in trying to find some income from selling of assets. Has your department been asked to review its assets?

Mr. Ron Herbert: Not to this point in time, not in terms of selling any assets.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. That was a brief intervention.

Two minutes now for the Conservative Party. Madam O'Neill-Gordon.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for being here. It's certainly great, and I'm even happier to have Ron Herbert here, because he tells me he has Miramichi roots and that means a lot to me.

First of all, I want to reiterate what you said about schools. Because of the great service you guys provide, I know, as a former teacher, that schools are enjoying the opportunity to get material and that children are becoming more and more aware and more involved. They're really focused on this, and I appreciate that. On behalf of the teachers back home, I certainly have to say thank you for all of what you have put into this.

The other thing is that my constituency includes quite a lot of rural areas. I'm wondering what plans or current arrangements VAC has to facilitate access to services by rural veterans. I feel they're getting good service, but are there special things being done for them?

Mr. Keith Hillier: Canada is a vast country, and providing services to what one might call rural veterans is a challenge. I would just like to highlight a number of things.

First of all, we have our national call centres to provide services in both official languages. We have our 24-hour hotline for those who are in distress, manned by professional counsellors. We also have our website. As we move forward, we would like to enhance that website to be able to move to a more transactional-based website, so that Canadians, wherever they may live, will have equal access.

Also, of course, many of our area counsellors visit. They don't stay in their offices, but they're actually out there. So when we are working in various communities, we work through the various veterans organizations so that veterans know we're in the area. So if somebody wants to make an appointment, then we're quite happy to see them when we're in a particular geographical area.

But other than that, the only areas where we're actually making some changes, if I might say, are in what has been previously announced by the government, jointly by Minister MacKay and our minister, with regards to the integrated personnel support centres on Canadian Forces bases. And of course we are moving aggressively in that area. There are no plans to create more offices across the country, but rather to try other means, such as electronic ones.

Finally, I might say we are working with some provinces in terms of telemedicine in order to be able to do diagnoses from a distance by the Internet.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: I certainly want to congratulate you for a great job.

The Chair: Ms. Gordon, that's all you get for this.

Monsieur Roy pour deux minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will try to be brief. I will ask you a very specific question. About three weeks ago I was informed about a case involving a veteran of the Korean War.

I would like to know if you have evaluated the procedures of appeal to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. How long can that take? How long does it take, on the average, for a veteran to go through all the stages of the procedure?

• (1725)

Mr. Keith Hillier: I think that it is very difficult to give any figures or opinions about the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, because we are here as members of the department.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: I did not ask you for your opinion. I asked you if you have evaluated the time that it takes for a veteran to get through all the stages of the appeal process.

This case involves a sick veteran. He feels that the process is far too long to complete. He will be dead by the time any results come about, this is very simply what it means.

[English]

Mr. Darragh Mogan: There are, of course, as we say in English, turnaround time standards for first applications for appeals, and they're met most of the time. I don't know exactly what the percentage is. It's very high. Where there's an urgent circumstance, where an individual is in grave trouble, we call that a red zone decision and we can move that through very quickly. If we're aware of anyone who's in a situation of the kind you describe, we'll move that through the red zone process that Keith manages, and we can get a response very quickly.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: What is the normal procedure?

[English]

Mr. Darragh Mogan: What's the first decision? Is it twenty-four?

[Translation]

For the first decision, it takes 80 weeks.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci beaucoup, monsieur Roy.*

Now on to Mr. Lobb, for two minutes.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Are you going to continue on, Tilly? Did you want to continue with your questions?

The Chair: Then Madam O'Neill-Gordon, for two minutes.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: What I was saying was that I know you are doing a great job and I thank you for all you've done. It was very obvious, while we were in Charlottetown, the great job that everybody is doing.

I did have another question, but I don't know where I put it now. No, I think that's it.

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I have a very brief question, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: *Petite question?*

Some voices: Oh!

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Yes, it is really very brief.

[English]

The Chair: Order, order.

We have enough time for one question from Mr. Julian, a brief question, and one question from Mr. Gaudet. Brief, please.

Mr. Peter Julian: *Merci beaucoup.*

To follow up, to finalize on the internal services, it's a half-million-dollar absolute reduction over three years; in real terms, greater than that. Can you explain that?

Mr. Ron Herbert: Yes.

One thing I want to stress to you, which I didn't make note of earlier, is that the number is not indexed as you see it here, but salaries are about 70% to 75% of our operating cost of the department. If there are increases in salaries, the department automatically receives those numbers. So that portion of our operating costs are indexed to inflation, although it doesn't reflect that here. It's at time-of-negotiation settlement.

In terms of the reduction that's here, small reductions based on probably...to be honest with you, I can't answer the question. It's very small. It's \$82.5 million to \$82.1 million, so we're talking about \$400,000, roughly.

If you'd like, I can respond to that in writing.

Mr. Peter Julian: Great.

Mr. Ron Herbert: Yes, if you want. No problem.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Herbert.

Une petite question, monsieur.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Are the ceremonies of November 11 well attended in the other provinces? There are ceremonies in Quebec, but I would like to know what the situation is in the other provinces. I do

not mean places near a military base. Instead, I am referring to places that are 100 or 200 kilometres away from a base. Do people in such places attend the ceremonies?

[*English*]

Mr. Ron Herbert: I wouldn't mind responding to that. The one I'm familiar with is the one in Charlottetown—huge numbers, huge numbers of people, and getting bigger and bigger every year. And they are in other cities as well.

● (1730)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I see. Charlottetown might not be the most representative place. I would rather hear about Ontario or Manitoba, for instance.

Mr. Keith Hillier: I think that the situation is the same everywhere in Canada. There is more interest in the ceremonies now than there was in previous years.

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Hillier, Mr. Herbert, Mr. Mogan, thank you very much.

Mr. Hillier, it has been quite a week for travel for you, out east and then coming back again, so we really appreciate your sharing your jet lag with us, and your words.

This meeting is adjourned.

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