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Chair

Mr. David Sweet

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• (0905)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC)): I now call the 37th meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to order.

I'd ask that all visiting media turn off their cameras now, please.

This meeting is televised, and we want to welcome our witnesses today: Lorraine Bartlett, Carletta Matheson, Margaret Hogan, and Bette Hudson.

I have three other names on the order paper. I take it they're in the audience observing.

We'll be beginning with opening statements. How many of the witnesses have opening statements? All four of you have opening statements. Could you give me an idea of the length? Are they about five minutes? Very good.

We'll start off with Madam Bartlett, with your opening statements, and then we'll go to a traditional round of questions afterward.

Ms. B. Lorraine Bartlett (Member, Widows on a Warpath): I want to thank you for meeting with us, the Widows on a Warpath, today. I am sure you are here out of genuine concern for our difficulties dealing with the bureaucracy around the issue of agent orange. I feel very confident you will do everything in your power to resolve this issue to the satisfaction of all concerned. I ask you to strongly consider everything we have to say in a fair and unbiased manner.

I would like to start by introducing the Bartlett family. First of all, I'll start with my late husband, James F. Bartlett. I just want to show you his picture. Now, this was the last picture of him before he was diagnosed with his cancer, so he looked good there. He was born on May 2, 1946, and died on June 15, 1984. He enlisted in the military on November 30, 1957. Jim spent a good portion of his military career in Gagetown. He had two terms in Cyprus, some time in Germany, he spent some time in Ottawa, and then his last posting was to Halifax.

He was diagnosed with colon cancer in March 1983. In April 1983 he had major surgery for the removal of the colon cancer. Following the surgery Jim had radiotherapy, which resulted in his having radiation enteritis. In March 1984 the cancer had spread to his lungs, and he was started on chemotherapy. By the time of his death he had tumours—and I say tumours because there were many—as large as 15 centimetres. They ranged from 9 centimetres to 15 centimetres in length.

While in Gagetown, Jim was exposed to agent orange. From my information, he was not only exposed to agent orange doing the exercises out in the field, he was directly sprayed with agent orange while on exercise in a Jeep. Did agent orange and other chemicals cause his cancer? I think so.

Then I have my daughter, Tracy Ann Bartlett. This is Tracy's picture—a beautiful lady. She is now 37 years old. Tracy was born with multiple disabilities. She has been labelled with a very rare condition. It's ODDD, for short. It's oculodentodigital dysplasia syndrome. It's extremely rare. I don't think there's any condition in North America. At the present time she is living with a family in a private home under community services. It has been a real blessing in our lives to have her there, because this family took Tracy in for respite care. She was given four to six months to live. That was 13 years ago. So that tells you what love and care can do for somebody.

Birth defects are caused by chemicals such as agent orange, agent purple, agent white, etc. Tracy is still a mystery to the health care providers, and most of the time they are at a loss as to how to treat her. About two years ago she was sent home from the hospital, and we were told to just sit beside her and hold her hand because she wasn't expected to live. Was her father's DNA altered because of contact with chemicals such as agent orange, therefore causing her birth defects? I strongly believe so.

Then I'll talk about my son. This is a picture of James. This picture is about a couple of years old.

James was born on November 10 in Halifax. He has chronic asthma, for which he spent much of his younger years in hospital. While in grade 3, he was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder with hyperactivity. These two conditions have had a profound impact on his quality of life.

At age 27, James was diagnosed with colon cancer. He had major surgery and chemotherapy for this. He was diagnosed with liver cancer about three years ago, and we were told his chances of survival were zero without surgery and 30% with surgery. However, during the surgery the doctor couldn't find any sign of cancer, which was a blessing. It was revealed after the surgery that a second test had recommended further testing. The surgeon failed to provide us with that information and went ahead with the surgery anyway.

Today, James appears to be cancer free but will undergo further testing in February. Every day of his life he has had to wonder if, when, and/or where the cancer will return.

Was James' cancer a result of his father being sprayed with agent orange and other chemicals? I strongly believe so.

Jim's death still affects me and my family today. Gathering information, writing letters, and preparing for this meeting have caused me to relive the tragedies in my life. I have had to open wounds that I thought had closed, and I have relived my loss.

Concentrating on past pleasant memories has given me the strength and determination to continue with my quest for justice. Ever since the death of my husband, the death of what could have been a normal healthy daughter, and the near death of my son, I have felt something wasn't right. I didn't quite know what it was until I learned about Jim having been directly sprayed with agent orange and other chemicals. It all fell into place and made sense to me. The spraying of chemicals seemed to explain all the health issues in one family, especially since there is no family history of most of these conditions.

I am now searching for the gift of truth. I feel the actions of others have determined my life and the lives of my children.

You have the opportunity here today to turn it around for all widows, their families, and future generations affected by the spraying of agent orange. We need to look forward for our children and their children. We need an apology. We need justice, and we need to be treated fairly.

Thank you.

• (0910)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Bartlett.

Now we will move on to Madam Matheson.

Ms. Carletta Matheson (Member, Widows on a Warpath): Good morning. You'll have to bear with me.

I'm Carletta Matheson, a Widow on a Warpath. This morning I am going to tell you about my experience with Veterans Affairs and access to information.

In March 2009 I began an investigation into the *ex gratia* program. I wanted to know how many cheques went to each district around base Gagetown. Specifically I wanted to know how much money went to each district in Greg Thompson's riding. I made the request through access to information, asking for a list of people who received the *ex gratia* payments in those locations.

On April 16, 2009, I received a list of 2,193 names, but I was not given the information I requested. This is a common theme amongst widows' stories. The *ex gratia* program ended on April 1, 2009, and even though the program was over, I knew people were still receiving cheques. So I requested a second list.

My name appeared on this list. I have not received any compensation. I have never received compensation, but my name was on the list of people who had. Because my name appeared on this list I thought I would receive compensation. The next day I called the Department of National Defence and informed them I had not received a cheque. I was told my name should not have been on this list. The cheque should have been in my hand.

This began a nightmarish journey. I received a letter from the department saying that my name appearing on this list was a computer error. I wondered how many computer errors there were. They asked me to send back my original copy. I said, no way. In July

I received a third list of names from Veterans Affairs. My name was not on this list. On the third list I received, the names appeared not once, not twice, but multiple times. The bottom of this list states, and I quote: "clients may also be caregivers and will/may appear on the report multiple times".

What does that mean? How can one person receive an *ex gratia* payment more than once? Why did so many people receive multiple cheques when so many victims received nothing? Why are we being refused when there's money left over? How much money has actually been paid out if multiple names and mistakes appear on this list?

Isn't the appearance of my name on this list a violation of my privacy, especially when I didn't receive a cheque? Is this a violation of the federal law?

The Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs have put me through so much. They have put me through hell. My husband served 36 years in the forces, and I believe the chemicals at CFB Gagetown killed him. Despite my husband's sacrifices, I have received no kindness and no consideration from Veterans Affairs. I am disgusted, hurt, and most of all angry.

Thank you.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Matheson.

We'll move now to Ms. Hogan.

Ms. Margaret Hogan (Member, Widows on a Warpath): I'd like to thank the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs for inviting me here today.

I'll start off by introducing myself. I'm Margie Hogan, a civilian who lived in Fredericton Junction, a community very close to CFB Gagetown, daughter of Herbert and Doris Hogan, and the youngest of four siblings. I represent the civilian side of this travesty.

Pesticides, herbicides, chemicals, and dioxins contained within the spray program used at CFB Gagetown from 1956 to the present is making people sick and is killing us with illnesses and diseases—2,4-D and 2,4,5-T, picloram, with a side order of dioxins. Dioxins and furans are considered toxic under Canada's own environmental act. It's making people sick. It's fat soluble, and the dioxins are passed up through the food chain from animals to humans. I have lost quite a few family members and I'm sure I'll lose more. I am affected as well.

With the *ex gratia* payment, we know that the April 1 deadline for all applicants was extended. However, the date of February 6 remains shut. To be fair to all applicants, you cannot open one door and lock the other. I know that cheques were still being issued in my area as late as November 2009.

Caretakers who were paid fully or in part by the province or in accordance with the Department of Health were able to apply for and have received the \$20,000 *ex gratia* payment as sole caregivers off the backs of the clients they were hired to look after. However, a spouse who was left behind was not entitled to apply on behalf of their spouse.

Civilians in communities around CFB Gagetown have been eliminated because of the so-called five-kilometre limitation. However, at Gagetown fair in 2009, the Minister of VAC, while meeting with us, made reference to a 20-kilometre radius on more than one occasion. If in fact it was 20 kilometres, why was only five kilometres indicated on the *ex gratia* form?

The forms were designed to discourage, frustrate, and start a maze of complicated processes while dealing with VAC.

A fair number of physicians are refusing to fill out the physician statements for the reason that there isn't one of the illnesses indicated, but upon going to another doctor...the connection is made. Some doctors flatly refused, point blank, to fill out the physician statement or sign it, because they were in dispute with the Province of New Brunswick over their wages and they were using this as a way of always bringing people back but not looking after their patients' best interests. They were proving a point to the government.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs stood up in the House of Commons in June 2009 and stated that all could apply for the agent orange pension. However, the first week after this announcement, a few civilians did receive the application, but the response from the Veterans Affairs office was that civilians were not entitled to apply for the agent orange pension; it was for the military and those in the service only. The minister did not put that stipulation in his announcement in the House. A few civilians did receive the application form, and when they asked for the status, they were told that the applications were sent out in error.

In Gagetown, in 2009, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, Greg Thompson, indicated that no civilians received the application for the agent orange pension. I can sit in front of you today and look you in the eye and tell you I did receive one. I am a civilian. To the best of my knowledge, there have been no pensions awarded to civilians.

There were issues with an independent affiliate with Veterans Affairs. A gentleman was helping people with their process so that no one got left out. However, when asked to show ID, he could only produce a driver's licence, as the business cards that were issued were supposedly not back from the printer. He was identified as an independent affiliate of Veterans Affairs. He would call widows at 9:30 on a Saturday night asking for the status of their application, whether they had received the \$20,000, and what was the status of their appeal.

● (0920)

We asked further questions about this gentleman as to what his authority was, who he reported to, who paid him, and what was his purpose. No one could come up with anything. It wasn't until November 5, when we went to the civic centre in Woodstock, that we spoke with the ombudsman and got them to look into it. We came to find out there was no job description for an independent affiliate because there was no such title.

This individual was a self-proclaimed advocate who had been affiliated with the minister from the beginning of the whole process of putting this together. There was no security clearance for this individual who was asking the widows questions. Since there was no independent affiliate, as I said, there was no job description available. Then we were told that this gentleman actually was a known individual with Veterans Affairs who was trying to do a great service for those people who were having difficulty with their application form. However, because he identified himself as an independent affiliate of Veterans Affairs and the Minister of Veterans Affairs' office itself, widows believed they had to tell him the status of their claim, whether or not they received the \$20,000, or if it was going to an appeal. This was not necessarily so.

I'm going to speak a bit about my family.

My father worked on the base. He trucked gravel there when they were building it. In fact, he was displaced from Petersville before the base was built. I lost him in 2001 from complications of diabetes—TIAs—mini strokes. He had to retire in 1984 as his health was getting worse.

This is our family—in 1966, a typical civilian family in a neighbouring community. This photograph was taken on September 3, 1966. Ten years later, we had another one taken. My brother died on March 25. I'm not apologizing for it because this is the brass tacks facts of what is going on in New Brunswick. He died of cancer. He worked on the base in 1967 and 1968. He helped remove brush that had already been sprayed by the deadly chemical agent orange to get rid of the brush.

My mother has thyroid issues. I have COPD and diabetes. My father is gone. My sister suffered miscarriages. My niece fell sick. This has to stop. My fiancé was working on the base in 1984. He went through the gate and showed his pass to cut the wood. The plane went over and sprayed them. They were outside. He got sprayed. The MPs arrived half an hour later, wanting to know why he was in the closed area. He had shown his pass at the gate. He went through. They waved him through as they did every other day. They did not know at the front gate that they were spraying. If they did, they didn't tell him or they wouldn't have let him go through. Now he has abnormal cells in his body. They can't determine what they are. He has high liver enzymes. His liver is swollen. We're still going through doctors, and this is not over for me yet.

I have two sons. My youngest son, Nicholas, was born with stomach issues and infections. He was diagnosed with Crohn's disease and colitis and he still has stomach issues today. My oldest son, Christopher, had to have surgery at the age of two to have a testicle removed because it was deformed.

These are the pictures. This is just a sample family of the civilians. We are sick and we are dying, and we did not ask to be a poisoned population. We did not ask for that.

I want to say that the Government of Canada is ignoring their own environmental act with this issue. However, let an oil company spill furnace oil on the ground, and Environment Canada is there immediately to pick up and clean up. If the spill is bad enough, homes are destroyed and people are moved. Nobody is even thinking of cleaning up what happened in New Brunswick. It's still there. It's still active. It's still in the ground. It's still making us sick.

I ask you to look in your hearts today and remember you were human first before you came into power. I ask who is going to step up to this travesty resulting from the spraying at CFB Gagetown and do what is morally and humanly right. Compensate all who were affected and clean up the contamination on the base and the surrounding communities. There needs to be something put in place for civilians, because we have nowhere to go with our issues—not Veterans Affairs, not the agent orange pension, as I said earlier. We have nowhere to go.

Veterans Affairs says it's for the ones in the military or in the service, but no one is looking after the civilian interests at all.

● (0925)

I strongly, strongly, strongly suggest that in recognition... The civilians who originally owned the land assisted in the building of the base, worked on base either as DND employees under the province, as contractors or woodworkers; if it wasn't for these civilians, the base would have taken a lot longer to build. Therefore, civilians are just as valuable and important to Veterans Affairs as the military and should be compensated as such, including benefits, pensions, and recognition for their sacrifices. There needs to be protection for the civilians. As of right now, we have none. We are losing our loved ones; we've got nowhere to go. It needs to stop.

There needs to be protection—if not through Veterans Affairs, as I said, I strongly, strongly suggest a department for civilians affected by DND Veterans Affairs. That needs to be created for civilians.

I thank you for allowing me to speak today.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Hogan.

Now on to Bette Jean Hudson.

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson (Member, Widows on a Warpath): Ladies and gentlemen, good morning, and thank you for having us.

I am Bette Hudson, a Widow on a Warpath.

Before continuing, I wish to introduce to you three of our members who have journeyed with us. They are Abbie Magee, a civilian widow; and Judith Wright and Gwen Knox, military widows.

As well, we have Daniel Feighery here. Daniel is making a documentary on Gagetown on the agent orange issue.

I did not come here to blame parties. I came to state concerns regarding the treatment of widows by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Government of Canada.

I represent a group of 100 widows who have grave concerns. Without great elaboration, we have all lost our husbands too soon because of the colossal blunder of spraying agent orange and other chemicals at and near Base Gagetown in the fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties, and beyond. We need answers and we need closure. We depend on this committee to provide these answers. Justice and righting the wrongs of the past can and should be done here today.

To begin, we have been unjustly treated regarding compensation through the *ex gratia* payment of \$20,000. From the day of the *ex gratia* announcement on September 12, 2007, widows were eliminated by a date—February 6, 2006. Our husbands were to have died on or after that date.

Ladies and gentlemen, do you think for one second they wanted to die? Worse still, do you think they should have died on a date of a government's choosing? How awful that a political date was chosen, the date the current government was sworn in.

We note that the end date of April 1, 2009, has been extended—one door opened, the other slammed in our faces. We stood no chance of receiving this payment because of the date. If you apply for yourself, you must suffer one of the approved illnesses. As caregivers, as each one of us was, the same thing applies. You must be ill. If you are reasonably healthy, forget it. Fairness? I don't think so.

Adding insult to injury, it was announced that any leftover moneys would be returned to general revenue. In other words, widows and their families are not worthy. Compensation for all victims of this tragedy was promised. This is a broken promise.

We would like something done about it. Yesterday we presented our demands. I hope everybody got a copy of those demands. If you didn't, we can supply them at the end of this session.

Very quickly, here are some—and there are many more—problems with widowed applicants for an agent orange pension: one, impossible and unrealistic proof; for example, the husbands were to have been soaked in agent orange; two, one widow was told by VAC that to receive her husband's documents, she must pay a \$260 archival fee; three, the process of getting information from doctors and hospitals, etc., is time-consuming and expensive; four, repeating your story to umpteen employees because no one really knows your file; five, witnesses who are not believed must have another witness for the witness; six, numerous letters from Veterans Affairs are signed by different people; seven, general feeling of hopelessness, helplessness; eight, widows who receive letters addressed to their deceased husbands—one letter was received on the eleventh anniversary of his death, addressed to him.

There are many, many problems.

● (0930)

We're not youngsters anymore, but we fight for what is right. We will continue until we receive justice for them. We speak for them, they can't. We are not going away. When we are gone, our children will take it up. This tragedy cannot be forgotten. People are suffering, they are dying. Unfortunately, generations to come have the same fate. Please help us do something about this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Hudson.

Thank you, ladies, for your testimony.

We will now go to rotation rounds of questions. The first rotation is seven minutes, and the first party is the Liberal Party.

Madame Sgro, seven minutes.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to all of you today. I realize you've come back a second time, but sometimes you have to come back many times until justice is done. I applaud your perseverance and your dedication. It is admirable.

Before I ask the questions, I want to take a moment to again recognize your courage and determination, not only for yourselves but for thousands of other people who are out there and are suffering, who just don't have the strength and the voices that you have. I'm so glad for what you are doing. Many have lost a partner or friend, and the children have been robbed of having a father. The fact is that agent orange, chemicals, have clearly entered our water and our air and seriously caused major problems not only in New Brunswick but in surrounding areas.

For me today, having you here is not about assigning blame. It's not about pointing fingers at who was in government, who is, and who wasn't. It's about trying to right a wrong and starting a beginning of a process that would ultimately give you the satisfaction of knowing that the issue has been thoroughly examined and looked at by whoever is necessary within the government today. CFB Gagetown and all of those on it, I believe, were used as guinea pigs. The government of the day permitted the testing of agent orange, a chemical that we know now to be incredibly dangerous. It's time that we all see that a fair restitution is paid and an apology is given to all of those who lived in Gagetown at the time and who continue to live there.

I do hope that today you will get a fair hearing, that you will leave here feeling that you got a fair hearing, and that this could be the beginning of a process that will help all of us understand the issue better and do what's necessary to make sure this never happens again.

I've tabled a motion with the committee, to be dealt with at the appropriate time, calling for a public inquiry. I understand that's an issue you have been asking for and that you feel very strongly about. I'd like you to elaborate a bit more on why you feel so strongly that we need to have a judicial inquiry on the whole issue of the agent orange.

Whoever would like to address that issue can speak. Do you want start, Ms. Hudson?

● (0935)

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: I think everybody in the country needs to know what has happened at Gagetown. It might be a long time ago, but people are still ill and they're going to get ill in the future, unfortunately. I think a public inquiry certainly would answer a lot of questions and lay a lot of fears away.

As I said, people need to know what's going on, and that's what would do it. A public inquiry would certainly do that. So we're all for a public inquiry, yes.

Hon. Judy Sgro: There has been a lot of work done. A lot of studies have been done. You're not satisfied with what has come out as a result of those studies?

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: No, we're not. We're not, for our widows. We feel that we have not been treated fairly by the government. A public inquiry would help clear it up for the widows and all the victims of agent orange. We've not been happy with how the whole thing has been handled. We would like to see an investigation into the *ex gratia* payment, how it was formed, how it was disbursed, how the cheques were disbursed, the major diseases that were presented. We're hearing all kinds of stories in our areas about cheques being handed out, for example, for carpal tunnel, being hard of hearing, and things that are not on that list. We're hearing all kinds of stories about that.

We're talking to people. As a matter of fact, we have some letters signed by people who received \$20,000, for example, for carpal tunnel. We have the proof here.

So we're not agreeing with how the *ex gratia* was set up, how it was handled, or how the cheques were disbursed. We're not agreeing with that. If we did not have that proof we wouldn't bring it up, but we do. It's available, if you would like to look at it afterward.

So we're not happy with that and we're not just an *ex gratia* group. What we want is fairness.

Hon. Judy Sgro: On the issues in the United States, could you explain that a bit? The rules of how the United States government is dealing with those who were present at the time of the chemicals and so on are different. They're being treated very differently from how we are treating them, as far as recognizing various illnesses is concerned. Can you elaborate a bit on that?

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: Could I let Margaret deal with that? She's been working more closely on that.

Ms. Margaret Hogan: Could I get you to repeat that please, Judy?

Hon. Judy Sgro: For those who are eligible for the *ex gratia* payments, there are very different rules in the U.S. versus here in Canada. My understanding is that in the U.S., if you were at all on the base or in the area with the spraying, regardless of what your problem was, you automatically receive it, whereas here we have very specific diseases that you have to have in order to qualify for the \$20,000 payment.

Ms. Margaret Hogan: The Americans are including more conditions whereas the Canadian side is not. In order to receive the \$20,000, you have to have one of those conditions. But it's very limited on this side of the border, because they're not acknowledging all the conditions. The American side has added Parkinson's. We've not seen that added to the Canadian list yet, but everyone talks about the study from the Institute of Medicine and the connection. It doesn't matter if you're south of the border or in Canada; the effects of this chemical on your body would be the same. I'm not sure why we're not acknowledging that on this side as well.

● (0940)

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: I think you were perhaps talking about the presumptive clause, that if your boot was on the soil when agent orange was used and other lethal chemicals—dioxin-laced chemicals—you automatically got an *ex gratia* or you were paid. It's not like that here in Canada. They don't have the presumptive clause that presumes that if you're in the area when lethal spraying takes place you'll be compensated. That's the difference between Canada and the United States.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you very much.

Ms. Margaret Hogan: I'd like to add something, if I may, please.

There are issues with the fact-finding mission study. You mentioned the studies that have been done. How can we really trust those studies if they were designed to come out with a certain conclusion before the study was completed?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Chair, could I ask the clerk if he would distribute the motion at this time that I had sent over earlier?

The Chair: We'll deal with that at the end of the meeting.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I realize that, but I think it could be circulated so that members could look at it before we have to vote on it.

The Chair: If we're talking about business at the end of the meeting, we actually have a motion before the committee already, by Mr. André. We finished the meeting. If you remember, the time ran out. So I think it would be best for us to deal with that after the questioning is done and the witnesses have been dismissed on both pieces of business.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I'm just asking that it be distributed. Most committees distribute whatever motions they have legitimately before the committee at the beginning of the committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. We can do that.

[*Translation*]

The next questioner is a Bloc Québécois member.

Mr. André, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Good morning, ladies.

I have great appreciation for what you're doing. First of all, I'd like to commend you. I think you are doing difficult work in a context where you have been victims of grave injustice on the part of the federal government in relation to the agent orange issue.

In 2006, I believe, before the Conservative Party came to power, the current minister, Mr. Thompson, had taken several steps in the

House calling for compensation for victims of agent orange. I would like to hear what you have to say regarding the recommendations the minister made at the time for victims of agent orange.

Further, I would like to discuss medical assessments. Are doctors currently in a position to correctly and specifically determine who, among the people who have been affected, including your spouses but also your children, were victims of agent orange? There has been a rather widespread effect on families.

Third, is \$20,000 in compensation enough?

● (0945)

[*English*]

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: Could you repeat the first part of your question? I didn't quite hear it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: When Minister Thompson was in opposition, he commented on several occasions. I recall that when I first arrived in the House, in 2005 or thereabouts, he rose a number of times to call for compensation for the victims of agent orange. What were his recommendations?

[*English*]

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: The recommendation he was making at the time, and he was quite adamant about it in the House of Commons, was that all victims be compensated, every victim of agent orange from 1956 to 1984. Victims from that era were all to be compensated. He was banging on the desk and what have you to compensate everybody, but when he got into government, that changed. He began to find reasons why certain people weren't going to get compensated. Things changed quickly when he got into government.

Margaret, would you like to add anything, or Carletta?

Ms. Margaret Hogan: I think the goals and the objectives of the minister changed once he came into power. When you stand up and make statements indicating that all victims of agent orange will be compensated, and then you're stuck with the year 1966 and 1967 after the fact... There are changes in direction in the goals and objectives of the minister. I believe they changed once he came into power. I know he did want an inquiry at one time; however, since he has come into power that also has fallen by the wayside.

Something changed there.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: My second question had to do with medical assessment. From a medical standpoint, are physicians currently in a position to specifically, and beyond a reasonable doubt, identify individuals who would have been victims of agent orange?

[*English*]

Ms. Margaret Hogan: When the physicians are asking for medical history, they're not looking at the environment. They never did. They're looking at who has what down the family line. But in order to make a true diagnosis, they need to take into consideration the environment from which you come and not necessarily who your mother is and what she had. They need to look at the environment as well.

Let's face it, some of these chemicals will attach to the DNA fat cells. It is passed through; it is fat soluble. It attaches to the fat, and it can come from animals and be transferred into humans. From DND's own documents, it indicates they were concerned that the short-term exposure of such a chemical would cause long-term health issues. We're seeing those long-term health issues now. We're seeing it now.

Some doctors can make the connection if they're into environmental studies and are looking at environmental medicine. But if you take a country doctor who is a family physician and knows families and what have you, they're not looking at that aspect of the connection. It is difficult for some of the doctors to make the connection when they're not using the environmental science or the chemical aspect. When a patient is sick and they don't know why, why not send them for testing to see if they have these chemicals in their body, instead of going through a different route in other areas?

Ms. B. Lorraine Bartlett: I'd like to speak to that from my personal experience with my daughter when she was born. It took almost three years before they labelled her, and they still weren't sure of the label, but she has the worst-case scenario of this very rare condition. We went though I don't know how many different geneticists at the beginning. As Margie said, the first thing they say is that it's in the family. We went through everything, and for want of anything else, they said it was hereditary. It was terrible.

First we were dealing with health issues. She was very seriously ill. We felt as if we were responsible for what had happened to Tracy because of the lack of knowledge of what had happened. Was I a drinker? Was I on drugs? Were Jimmy and I related? We went through that whole scenario, and I can't describe to you the hell we went through in those first few years.

Even to this day, as I mentioned in my talk, the doctors are flying by the seat of their pants. They don't know what's wrong with her. In the last few years she started having seizures, but they're not really seizures. They're calling them seizures for want of calling them anything else. She flat-lines. She's just there, hardly breathing. We don't know what causes it or how long she'll be in it. She was like that for five hours on one occasion. They worked on her like you wouldn't believe, but they don't know.

A year and a half ago she went into one of these, and the doctors hospitalized her just to see if it would happen again. But of course Tracy fooled them, as she always does. Nothing happened, so they sent her home. The doctor spoke with me very nicely and said, "I don't want to tell you not to bring your daughter into the hospital. But when she comes in here, we have to poke and probe." At one point they tried about 15 to 20 times to get an IV into her, because her veins are so tiny and they couldn't do it. That's very painful for her. He said, "Maybe you should just keep her home if it happens again and hold her hand. If you bring her in here, we're going to treat her and it's going to be painful for her. But there's absolutely nothing we can do to bring her out of this. She comes out of it on her own, for whatever reason."

The doctors are not looking at the environmental issues. Was it the chemicals? Is her condition the result of the spraying of agent orange?

I forgot to mention before that I have three stories: my husband's story, my son's story, and my daughter's story. I gave them to the

clerk, and he can pass them out. They will give you a little more information about what our lives have been like because of all of this.

• (0950)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Bartlett.

Merci, monsieur André.

We'll go to Mr. Stoffer for five minutes.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

To all of you, thank you very much for sharing your stories with us. I know having to relive this every day of your lives goes to the old saying that for those who serve, Remembrance Day is every day, and to their families left behind, it's every minute of every day.

I'll give a little history here beforehand. As you know, the previous government, when the minister was there—and they were honest about it—said they would only compensate, for 1966-67, the agent orange aspect alone. I remember going after them, and the current minister, who was in opposition, Mr. Thompson, said the same thing. He said that was not enough. I remember very well the meeting in Gagetown when he said that every single person from 1956 to 1984 will be compensated and a public inquiry will be initiated. I remember those words very clearly. It never happened.

In fact, they did exactly what the previous government was offering, a 1966-67 compensation package only. For the life of me, I don't really think Mr. Thompson himself wanted that to happen, but somebody somewhere in the bowels of government said, "This is the way it's going to be, end of conversation", and thus we had this out. I simply cannot believe the mistakes, though, that were happening. You were told that you got the compensation in the lists, but you never received it, and a civilian received \$20,000 for carpal tunnel syndrome? It's incredible, and these are questions we're going to be asking DVA officials in the future.

My question for you is this. Just recently the Government of Canada announced an inquiry on the Fraser River salmon, which we had asked for and which we received. Many people from the Agent Orange Association across the country have called me and asked, "If they can call an inquiry on fish stocks, which is important, couldn't they then call an inquiry on the lives of people who served their country from 1956 onward?" That's my first question for you.

My second one for you is, have you had an opportunity yourselves to speak directly with the Prime Minister of Canada? I would highly recommend that if you get an opportunity, speak to him directly, as other people have done when they've come to Ottawa, and address your concerns directly with him. I can only assume that if the Prime Minister himself gets a five- or ten-minute session with you, I think maybe, just maybe, he might be sympathetic enough to get the wheels of government turning in your favour.

I'm personally sorry for what you and your families are going through. One of the concerns here, of course, is that we say agent orange, but it's not just agent orange, it's all the other chemicals that were sprayed before. Many people didn't serve in 1966-67, they served before and after, and they have died because of chemical spraying. I'd like you to elaborate a bit more on that as well, please.

Once again, thank you to each and every one of you for coming.

• (0955)

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: Could we ask Daniel Feighery to come up and answer your question on chemicals?

Mr. Daniel Feighery (Director of film "Gagetown", As an Individual): Can you repeat the question, please?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: The question was this. We talked about agent orange from 1966-67 as the limit of compensation because that's when the Americans were involved in that. But the reality is that chemicals were sprayed long before that and long after that—not just agent orange, but a variety of other toxic chemicals that, although I'm not a medical scientist, I believe would have detrimental effects on people's health currently and their future offspring as well.

Mr. Daniel Feighery: That's right.

I've interviewed a number of medical scientists—

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Excuse me for interrupting. What is Mr. Daniel's position? What does he do in life; in what way is he qualified to provide us with information?

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Well, sir, he just wants to know who you are and why you're here.

Mr. Daniel Feighery: My name is Daniel Feighery. I've been following the Widows on a Warpath since June 2008. I feel as though I know their story inside out.

I've been doing a documentary on Gagetown and the entire spray program for two years. My family was personally affected. My grandfather served on the base. My mother grew up on the base. And my sister was born with spina bifida, a birth defect associated with agent orange. That's what prompted me to start the film. My sister received \$20,000 from the Canadian government, and I didn't know why, so I looked into it. So that's why I began this process.

I met the widows. And I started interviewing dozens of people, including the minister himself, Elizabeth May, Judy Sgro, and many people in this room.

With regard to the chemicals, agent orange and agent purple were used on the base from 1956 until 1967. They weren't called agent orange and agent purple at the time, because those are American military code names. These chemicals were available commercially. They were used all across Canada.

After 1967 and a spray plane accident that caused the Government of Canada to compensate a number of farmers to the tune of \$250,000, which was a lot of money in the 1960s, the Canadian military switched to tordon 101. It is known by the Americans as agent white, and it is contaminated with a chemical known as picloram. This is found in hexachlorobenzene.

These chemicals cause a wide range of illnesses that are not on any of these lists of illnesses recognized for this compensation package. I could go on and on about the chemicals, but I think that's pretty much...

The other really important thing to say is that agent white was used on the base until 2001. At that point they switched to glyphosate herbicides.

The chemical program continues to this day. The government did testing on the base and found 2,4,5-T, which was last sprayed in 1967. It's supposed to have a half-life of less than a year. How are they finding chemicals 40 years later on the base and then claiming this base is safe? Troops are training there right now to go to Afghanistan. This base is still contaminated.

• (1000)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: My other point for you folks was the inquiry. Why do you think an inquiry hasn't been called yet?

Ms. Margaret Hogan: Because it's going to uncover more issues. It's going to bring to light the unfairness, the injustices, and the blunders. The way errors are continuing to happen is almost like slapstick comedy, in a sick way. And I think to save face is why it has not been called yet.

When it is called, it is so important that someone represents the civilians to oversee and help them with the inquiry, the errors, and the blunders, and to work with them to make it right, if there is a way of doing that. But I do believe this is why it has not been called.

The Chair: Now we're going to move to the Conservative Party for seven minutes.

Mr. Kerr.

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for coming today. We fully appreciate how difficult this is for each of you. Certainly, the amount of time and suffering is real. Nobody doubts that. I think everybody around this committee, in looking at the issues, tries to be open and fair. I'm going to disagree a little with some of the comments made, but I want to explain why and see what your response might be.

I want to point out that, going right back to the 1960s, governments failed to deal with the issue. So when it was dealt with, there were going to be problems. I think Ms. Sgro would agree with this. I think everybody recognized that. As time went by, it became more difficult to do the job correctly and resolve the issues. As your stories today attest, the amount of complications and challenges are huge. There's no question about that.

I also want to put on record that we keep talking about compensation. This is recognition of time passed, and a lot of the records are so old they could not be dealt with. The \$20,000 payments aren't for the injuries or suffering of any individual. They're given in recognition that those individuals were affected by this issue. Therefore the recognition, the amount of money, does not necessarily equate directly with any one individual's suffering. It was done. Nearly 2,700 people have received it.

I'm not sure there's a right or wrong. I wanted to note that the very study the former Liberal government put together became the basis for the jump-off point. What has become apparent is that there cannot be an exactly correct record. I notice Minister Thompson's name came up several times. He is the first minister of any Government of Canada to bring about a recognition of suffering and a payment for it. I think that's important for the record. Whatever government did it, there were going to be challenges, questions, and difficulties. As we're finding out, the story is not over yet.

If you stood back and looked at it objectively, you'd have to say that this federal government is the only government in the history of Canada that has provided compensation for a problem admittedly too horrific to be satisfied solely by financial means. It's easy to take potshots and point out what was or wasn't said. The usual date for compensation in government starts when the government was sworn in, which happens to be the case here. It doesn't mean this is the point in history that makes it right or wrong, but this is the normal thing for governments to do, to begin with the day they became the government.

We're here to try to learn more. The questions and answers put forth today are on record and are looked at carefully. When Ms. Sgro asked about the inquiry, she was talking about an inquiry on the whole issue. I got the sense that the inquiry you want is just about payments. If there's a further look, it's a look at the whole thing to show how difficult it is to end up doing the correct thing.

It's important that we continue with this issue; it's not going away. We need to remind ourselves that other jurisdictions are looking at it. The American example, by the way, is a compensation. It's not an *ex gratia* payment; it's a compensation program. That means there are different criteria. This gets into pensions and all kinds of other things as well.

What I'd like to do is get your comments, as the whole process moves forward. It's been a long time coming—there's no question about it.

•(1005)

I start with the premise that, okay, mistakes have been made, and I don't think anybody is going to disagree that maybe mistakes were made. I start with the premise that, okay, something has been done. If something had not been done in 2006, then nothing would have been done and we would be in the mess where nobody received anything. I think it's important to look at that. I know you're saying, how do we move on and push it further?

Having made those points, I would open it up if you would like to comment or make further suggestions. I would certainly welcome that. I don't want to go to a specific question at this point.

Ms. Carletta Matheson: The most important thing that I see is the dates. We stood in Gagetown, and Thompson stood right there, and we battled, every one of us. But he stood there and said, point blank, "These dates—*d-a-t-e-s*—will never change". Now, where is the fairness? They couldn't open up our door, but they let them slide through the front door. That's not fair. That is not fair.

We're talking about fairness here. Tell me where the fairness is.

Dates are what we're talking about. We can't open one door, but we can open and slide people through the second door. That's not fair.

Mr. Greg Kerr: When you say open one and close the other, are you talking about the start date and the finish date?

Ms. Carletta Matheson: That's exactly what I'm talking about.

Mr. Greg Kerr: The finish date, I understand, was to make sure that anybody who was in the application process still had time to finish it before it was closed off. You're talking about when it was actually started as being the most critical date.

Ms. Carletta Matheson: No, I'm talking about the access as well. There have been many, many names go through that after the date—even until June, July, and November. This is what I'm getting at. I want to know where the fairness is. We were at the front door; they were at the back door. They slid through, and we had the door slammed in our face. Now, they're still paying people and they won't even come close to us. That's not fair.

Mr. Greg Kerr: All right. Is that it?

The Chair: I know it always goes fast.

We're now going on to the Liberal Party for five minutes.

Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all our guests, our witnesses, for being with us today. I think we will trip over ourselves thanking you, so I'm not going to waste time on that.

I actually may get in trouble with my political bosses for saying this, but I also do want to extend some good consideration to the Conservative government for having opened the door on this compensation. I think that needs to be recognized as good work. I think that's part of the story. What you're now talking about is the rest of the story.

As I've come to know this story—and I'm still new at this and still gathering more information on it—there are several issues around agent orange. This is only one very specific issue that has to do, obviously, with those who have had husbands die before 2006, when this date was arbitrarily set.

I might challenge my Conservative members to find another date, another time where any program has actually been arbitrarily set at the date of a government being sworn in. I actually have never heard of that, ever. It seems to be quite unusual and rather political and, I think, not very helpful.

The thing I would like to focus on and get more information on is your relationship with Veterans Affairs Canada and maybe DND and the kinds of bureaucratic problems that you've had. You've suggested some of them and your experience of trying to get through the system. You've raised some issues I have not heard of before, especially through Ms. Matheson's freedom of information request. Can you explain a little more about your problems in dealing with the actual department officials, which we may be able to help with?

•(1010)

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: Right.

There are many problems with getting through the bureaucracy. You feel as if there is no real interest in your case. You'll call Veterans Affairs, tell them your name, and the next time you call, you get somebody else and you have to repeat your whole story all over again. They're constantly losing forms and letters: "That was lost. We can't find it, so you need to resubmit that." So you go to get the doctor's signature, you pay \$50, you run and get these forms, and you call or you mail them in.

There's something odd about this as well. I sent for my agent orange pension form. It was sent to me. Any doings I have had with Veterans Affairs were either in Charlottetown or Saint John, New Brunswick. But when I got my forms, I was to send them to Campbellton.

I sent them to Campbellton, which was weird to me, because I had always dealt with either Charlottetown or Saint John. Why did I have to send my forms there? Well, it was a new office, or whatever. So I sent them there. I have not received anything—or yes, I did; I received a letter telling me it would be 24 weeks before I would hear about this pension. Well, I haven't heard anything yet.

It just seems to me that to get anything done through Veterans Affairs you need to, please, get one person to look after so many people, rather than have us get somebody different every time and have to repeat, over and over again. Your letters get lost; your forms become lost. For example, one of the widows was told, "You can't apply for that pension; you have to be ill." It's things like this.

Or imagine receiving a letter addressed to your deceased husband. It just opens the wound all over again. It's a sad situation. We've had two or three widows receive letters addressed to their deceased husbands. How horrible is that!

Here is another thing. One widow was told, "Now, you just watch what you're saying to me. Don't you talk to me like that." Well, this lady is in her eighties. She doesn't need to be talked to like that. Treat these people with respect. We're respectful to Veterans Affairs; they have to be respectful to us. It isn't right to be treated that way.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I was just going to ask, have any of you—

The Chair: Your time is up. It's now six minutes, and it was a five-minute round. I know, it always flies.

We now go over to the Conservative Party, to Mr. Storseth for five minutes.

• (1015)

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for coming forward today. I would particularly like to thank you for the self-sacrifice and dedication that your husbands, you yourselves, and your families have made for our country. Having family members who have served in Gagetown, I know the sacrifice it takes for not just the servicemen and servicewomen, but also the families helping.

This is troubling because, having had family serving there, I've obviously heard the stories and know much of what's happened, and I actually know many people who still live in Gagetown. But in dealing with this and in discussing it around the kitchen table, oftentimes what I've been told by my family members was that it's

not so much the compensation amount, but the recognition of the wrongs that happened, the recognition of the problems that were discovered through this, and really, the generally appalling nature of what happened.

Is that the main, driving issue that you're looking to bring forward in this?

Ms. Margaret Hogan: Yes, it is. How can you make people sick and not apologize or acknowledge in apology? We lost loved ones, and everyone agrees that this is a tragedy, but nobody will stand up to say we are sorry that your loved ones are dead, sick, or dying; we are sorry that we killed your husband through the use of pesticides.

We're not getting that. We're getting the acknowledgment that it is a travesty, but no one will say "I'm sorry" or be accountable for it. There's nothing. We know you yourselves didn't personally go out and spray it; however, the Government of Canada approved it. They sprayed it. So we need an apology. We need to know that they did not die and suffer in vain; that they will be acknowledged and respected.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Unfortunately, in our system, when there are court cases and other things, they sometimes limit the ability of government to speak frankly and openly. I think it is important to what you're doing to bring forward this issue and to make sure it is recognized and that the travesty that happened in this case is recognized. As was brought up earlier, it's not just in Gagetown.

How many thousands of people are we talking about, in your minds? There are 2,700 who have received something. How many thousands of people are we talking about, in your minds?

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: Well, it's difficult to say, because I believe a lot of these people are spread from coast to coast in the country. After they left Gagetown...if they're not dead, they're probably in all provinces of Canada. I wouldn't be able to speculate on how many hundreds of people we're talking about, but I know we are talking about hundreds, if not thousands.

Mr. Brian Storseth: If Mr. Stoffer wants to make a comment, maybe he could just make it, rather than pass it down the line.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I'm sorry. I was advising Ms. Bartlett of figures that were given before by previous governments.

Mr. Brian Storseth: What are those figures?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: They could be up to 300,000.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Up to 300,000? That is a lot of people, I think we all agree.

Before my time is up, although I want to get to that matter, I want to say that I understand how difficult it can be to deal with a federal bureaucracy at times. It's often like running into a brick wall. In my experience, dealing with Veterans Affairs is generally better than dealing with most other parts of the bureaucracy, but certainly everybody here at this table understands and everybody at home understands and sympathizes with how difficult it can be to deal with a bureaucracy as large as we have with the Government of Canada.

When we're talking about potentially up to 300,000 people, obviously if you were to set up this program, you would have to put some dates in place. Or would you just leave it wide open, from the beginning of when this started to happen until...? On what date would you close it off?

Obviously there are problems with implementation; there always are, in anything you do. With the residential school apology, one of the biggest things to happen in our country in the last five years, it was great. The acknowledgment was there on behalf of the Government of Canada, and first nations people in my community who were affected were touched by it. But there were still people left out in the actual implementation of it.

What dates would you recommend for the implementation?

• (1020)

Ms. Carletta Matheson: When it came out, it was fair enough, I guess. I don't know; I'm not the one to say. But what really bothers me—and I'll go through it again, and it's still not fair—is that he stood there and he said point blank: “Dates—*d-a-t-e-s*—will never change. It's carved in stone.” One was slammed, one was opened; figure it out.

Mr. Brian Storseth: But what would you pick for dates, if it were up to you? It's a tough decision. I think we can recognize that it was a very difficult decision.

Ms. Carletta Matheson: I'm not a politician; I have no idea about this side of it. But I still think it's very unfair.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Well, I thank you very much for your time and for coming forward.

Ms. Margaret Hogan: I would like to make a comment, if I could.

The Chair: Madam Hogan.

Ms. Margaret Hogan: You referred to the apology to the first nations people for the suffering they went through. People need to realize that an acknowledgement and apology will help us with closure and help us to continue and allow us to know that we're not fighting in vain. We're not going away. We're not. The acknowledgement and apology is what is needed to help our healing.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Hogan.

Now we go on to Monsieur Gaudet, *pour cinq minutes*.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Thank you very much.

Generally, at the Committee on Veterans Affairs, there's no partisanship but it would seem that your illness must not be affecting public opinion because as soon as public opinion reaches

government... If you take for instance what happened in the Maher Arar case, we see there have been apologies, he has received millions of dollars. Public opinion got involved. You referred to aboriginals earlier on. The Japanese also received an apology and compensation for what happened to them during the Second World War. It would seem that public opinion is not behind you. It reminds me of Shannon, in Quebec, and its tainted water. It's as though public opinion is absent, that you're going nowhere, that governments are not interested in you.

Earlier on my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, said that you were only expecting \$20,000. That is nothing to my mind. Ms. Hudson, you have said you have had many problems. You listed eight of them in your letter, but I think it is in that respect that you are trying to find solutions, far more than the \$20,000.

A voice: A public apology.

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I am in agreement for calling for a public apology, but in your presentation you said that only part of your recommendations to the department had to do with responsibility for your problems. Tell me about the other parts? You've listed eight here, but you say you sent in a number of others. Would it be possible for the committee to receive them, for each committee member to receive them as well?

[English]

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: Yes, we certainly can. We have them with us, but I don't know if we have enough copies today. We can certainly get them to you.

The Chair: Just a moment there, Mr. Gaudet, I'll just instruct the witnesses.

If you send that copy to the clerk, it will be translated into both official languages and then it will be distributed to the committee members.

Thank you.

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: Yes.

The Chair: Proceed, Mr. Gaudet.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Could you tell me about the other recommendations you've made that are not listed here but are also very important?

[English]

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: Do you want to hear them all? Do you have any at all?

• (1025)

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: No, but tell us about a few that are important to you.

[English]

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: The most important one to me is the apology, because as you said, \$20,000 is nothing. There wouldn't be any amount of money anyone could give me to compensate for my husband, so an apology is very, very important to me.

But here are our demands:

One, compensate every widow fairly for the early death of their husbands who died with agent orange-related diseases.

Two, immediately convene a public judicial inquiry into the agent orange tragedy at CFB Gagetown.

Three, remove Mr. Thompson as Minister of Veterans Affairs, as he has not fulfilled the mission statement of the Department of Veterans Affairs, which states and I quote:

To provide exemplary, client-centred services and benefits that respond to the needs of veterans, our other clients and their families, in recognition of their services to Canada; and to keep the memory of their achievements and sacrifices alive for all Canadians.

Four, apologize to each and every widow, whose loss cannot be measured, to admit to us that the Canadian government did a great disservice to all victims of the spray program.

Five, launch an immediate investigation into the dispersal of *ex gratia* payments—that is, decisions as to who received the cheques, who was denied, and why. Why were the years 1966 and 1967 designated when we know spraying took place between 1956 and 1984?

Six, investigate the Department of Veterans Affairs itself, as it has shown it is a bureaucracy comprised of people who regard us as unworthy and treat us in an undignified manner.

Seven, let proven illness and diseases be qualifiers, not only those listed on the agent orange *ex gratia* application form.

Eight, give an acknowledgement and a display of respect for all husbands—military and civilian—who died, and who died before the Harper power date.

Ms. Margaret Hogan: Nine, provide compensation from the government for their part—in other years prior to and post-1966-67—in the chemical spraying at CFB Gagetown.

Ten, send a letter of apology from the independent affiliate to the widows whom he offended with rude remarks and argumentative tones during various late-night conversations on the telephone.

Eleven—and this is so important and key—all who sit in the House observe one minute of silence to show respect, dignity, and compassion for our late husbands' suffering as a result of this spraying. That's one minute of silence.

Twelve, test for dioxins on property and in water sources at CFB Gagetown and surrounding areas with an open, public-issued true report, the cost of such testing to be assumed by the Government of Canada.

Thirteen, provide full disclosure as to where the money came from for the *ex gratia* payment for agent orange. Did it come from the Government of Canada? Did it come from the Americans? Did it come from the chemical company? Where exactly did that money come from?

Fourteen, make a detailed statistical report on the medical conditions and diseases. Which were paid for and which ones were rejected?

Fifteen, provide a statistical report on the number of appeals that were successful versus those appeals that were not, also broken down by gender and age.

The above demands are not unreasonable to meet at all, as it's time we had an open, honest government accountable to us, the widows, and to all Canadians who knew and loved our husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, aunts, mothers, families who have been destroyed. People have been unknowingly poisoned, and illnesses, conditions, diseases, and deaths have plagued our families. More than a generation has been affected.

The Government of Canada needs to be accountable for its part in the agent orange spraying program and other chemicals at CFB Gagetown. We are here for our husbands. We are here for our loved ones. We are here fighting for the rights of our husbands and loved ones, as they no longer can. We, the Widows on a Warpath, are able to stand up for what is right, and it is time the Government of Canada did the same.

Always remember that you were human first before you came into politics.

Thank you.

• (1030)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Hogan and Mr. Gaudet.

We'll go to the Conservative Party and Mr. Mayes, for five minutes.

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies, thank you for being here today.

In 2006 when I was first elected, I was put on this veterans affairs committee, and I think there are only four of us from that original new government committee—me, Mr. Stoffer, Mr. Gaudet, and Mr. Sweet. As a new member of this committee, I was quite excited that our minister and our government was moving forward with a veterans charter to better serve the needs of veterans. We also started on putting together an Office of the Veterans Ombudsman to assist veterans as they move forward trying to get a voice to get benefits. Then our government also supported extending the veterans independence program and added \$350 million. That was all under the leadership of this committee and our minister, and I think the minister has veterans and those who serve Canadians at heart.

One thing about leadership is that it's about taking responsibility, even responsibility for bad public policy. Governments have had bad public policy. I can tell you, within two years of our government coming into being government, we did the Indian residential schools settlement. We did the Chinese tax settlement. We did the tainted blood settlement. These are outstanding items. There was also the agent orange. Those weren't compensations; they were settlements, saying, okay, there was bad public policy. But to go back and try to figure out the individual impact on lives is very difficult, because you can't measure some of that. It is so catastrophic for people.

I talked with a first nations chief. He told me he didn't know how to be a father. He was in a residential school. He was never mentored by a father, because he was in a school situation and taken away from his family. How do you compensate for those things?

It's similar with this issue here. The people who established the \$20,000 are not mean people or bad people. They looked at the situation and tried their best to make these tough decisions. And dates have to be set. My mother-in-law was interned in a Japanese internment camp, and some of the stories and about the loss of life of family members there... They were compensated. Was that enough? No, it wasn't compensation. It was simply a recognition of bad government policy. It was a recognition, in making that statement, that we apologize. It was bad policy. We know it's wrong today, but it's so difficult to go back and really heal those wounds that you feel. What is enough? How long in the future do we go to compensate that or to even acknowledge it? You can't. It's impossible.

It's unfortunate these dates didn't necessarily align with some of the issues of each individual person who was involved with Gagetown, but dates have to be set. I've heard there are issues for people even with regard to the tainted blood settlement. But ultimately, we have to make those decisions.

As my colleague said, what would you suggest as a date? You really didn't suggest a date, because you realize how difficult it is to make that determination.

One of the things I would like to ask is, do any of you receive any benefit from Veterans Affairs other than what you're looking for here, in terms of compensation? During the time your spouse was alive, were you able to apply for any of those benefits, for instance, the veterans independence program, to assist you in staying in your own home, those types of things?

• (1035)

Ms. Carletta Matheson: No.

Mr. Colin Mayes: Okay, that's available now.

Ms. Margaret Hogan: Where would a civilian go for that aspect of it?

Mr. Colin Mayes: You're right; it's extended to those who have served.

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: Pardon me, if you're discussing half of our husbands' military pension after death, yes, I received that.

Mr. Colin Mayes: Do you receive any other benefit through the—

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: I receive half of his disability pension. It's \$72.40 a month. Now, my husband paid into his pension for his

whole army career, so that's his money, right? I get half of his military pension, half of his disability, so I get \$72 a month, but I have not applied for supplements.

Mr. Colin Mayes: Thank you. We are trying to do our best to serve those who have served our country.

Ms. Margaret Hogan: I would like to make a comment, if I could.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mayes.

I'll come to you in just a second, Madam Hogan.

Madam Matheson, you had a comment, but your mike wasn't on, so it wouldn't be on the record. Do you want to go ahead?

Ms. Carletta Matheson: I just said that it's the same for me. I receive the same thing as Bette receives. It's \$79 a month.

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Bartlett.

Ms. B. Lorraine Bartlett: I don't receive a disability pension from my husband. I do receive part of his regular pension.

He had terminal colon cancer. When I tried to apply for a disability pension after the fact, I was told I could not apply for it because cancer is not a disability pension illness. I was denied because of that. I was also told that because he didn't apply for a disability pension before he died, I can't qualify for it now.

Ms. Margaret Hogan: You indicated that dates were set and had to be adhered to because they had to set a date. To my way of thinking, dates were set. All victims of the chemical spray agent orange would be compensated from 1956 to 1984. Those are the dates that should be indicated—not 1966 and 1967 but those dates there, 1956 to 1984 and beyond. When they stop spraying, then they need to look at a closure date, but not until then.

I wanted to bring that up because the dates were stated. They were set when the Prime Minister stood up and said that all would be compensated from 1956 to 1984.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Lobb. You have five minutes.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, ladies, for coming today and telling us your personal stories. It must be difficult to reach back and think about those times and be able to put them forward in a public manner. I appreciate that you've done that.

You also might be interested to know that the members of this committee, unlike most committees up here in Ottawa, by and large work well together in a non-partisan manner, while most committees, I think, operate in a partisan manner. It is in the spirit of the veterans that we work to do the best we can for veterans.

I wonder if you would comment on the communication that took place for those in the 1966-67 timeframe. Could you tell us what your experiences have been in dealing with those people in your areas, and how well they felt the communication process worked?

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: I'm sorry, I just...

• (1040)

Mr. Ben Lobb: It was the process to inform and educate those who might be potentially eligible.

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: Do you mean with the *ex gratia* payment?

Mr. Ben Lobb: That's correct.

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: The first communication we had after we made application was that you have not proven your husband was deceased on or after February 6, 2006, and therefore you are denied the *ex gratia* payment. That was the first communication. We were excluded, denied, because of the date.

Mr. Ben Lobb: What I was trying to get to, though, was the significant campaign that went forward. It is a tremendous project to try to educate and notify people from coast to coast, as you mentioned before, with national press releases, news conferences, and online materials. Granted, not everybody is online, and we recognize that. There are publications such as the *Salute!* newsletter, and there was a substantial news campaign or publication campaign.

Generally speaking, were there any comments from people saying that they felt they had missed it somehow? It was an extensive program in terms of the media. Is there any thought on that?

Ms. Margaret Hogan: I actually would like to respond to that, if I may.

I am a civilian and I have dealt with a lot of civilians who did not even apply because the forms were so complex. When they called to see if this qualified or that qualified or where they needed to go, they were getting different responses depending on who they talked to. The training at VAC, when this first came out, for the employees was just as confusing, I believe, as it was for the civilians who tried to apply. The list of conditions written on the *ex gratia* form—that was a criterion you had to have—were written in terms that a physician would understand, not the everyday person. I feel that this was done on purpose to discourage people not to apply. People even thought they were going to lose their medicare if they applied, or some of their old age pension. There was a lot of confusion with it.

You cannot tell me that everyone who did qualify did apply, when it was designed to discourage a lot. I realize that it is Veterans Affairs and there's a lot of talk about veterans and what have you—

Mr. Ben Lobb: I'm sorry to interrupt you, Ms. Hogan. That's a good point that you made, and I think it was also in the initial speeches when the meeting kicked off today, about the forms. I noticed that here in the briefing there's no mention of simplification of forms. Is that in any of your suggestions? I know you read some. Was that in any of the suggestions there?

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: No, but it should be.

Ms. Margaret Hogan: It should be. That is something that needs to be added, most definitely.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Perhaps when you submit them to the clerk, that is something you could add—

Ms. Margaret Hogan: We can do that.

Mr. Ben Lobb: —with maybe some examples of where it is complicated and how to simplify it, because I'm sure they'd be interested in that feedback to be able to improve future processes.

Ms. Margaret Hogan: We'll certainly do that.

The Chair: Your time has expired.

Now we're on to Mr. Andrews for five minutes.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Unlike Mr. Lobb, I'm a new member to Parliament and a new member to the committee, and I'm getting up to speed on these issues very quickly.

I have to take one exception to Mr. Mayes' comments, when he talked about the government paying out compensation for residential schools and all these—

• (1045)

Mr. Colin Mayes: I didn't say compensation, I said settlement. There's a difference.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Okay. I'm sorry, there is a difference. Settlement.

My point is that they were forced to do most of the ones he listed because of class action lawsuits. It's unfortunate that it comes to this, and I'm somewhat familiar and I understand there's a class action going on in my province of Newfoundland and Labrador on this very issue.

One question would be this, if you could help me: are there any other class action lawsuits that you're familiar with?

As for my second question, you're right, dates are important, and governments can pull dates out of the air and February 6, 2006, was a date they pulled out for that particular program. On that issue of being alive on February 6, 2006, is there a date that you would like to see that at for compensation purposes? I know we've talked about from 1956 to 1984; we've talked about the list as well. I'm just curious about that date.

My third question is to you, Ms. Matheson. On those documents you received from...I believe you said Veterans Affairs, your name was on the list and then it wasn't on the list, and then they kindly said, well, would you mind returning that one. How many people who were identified on that list had been removed on the second list? Did I understand that correctly?

Ms. Carletta Matheson: We really don't know; I had three lists given to me. They gave me the second. They asked for my list back and told me that in return they would give me a new list. They sent me my new list but it was totally different from the first. They scrambled it, and they did whatever they could to really confuse us.

I really can't pinpoint the exact amount.

Can you, Bette?

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: No.

Ms. Carletta Matheson: No, I can't.

But I can tell you it was a shock to me. It was unfair. I thought I had it. This is playing around with minds.

And it's very interesting as to how I got the apology we received.

There should be an inquiry into the lists of names, because there are a lot of things going on. Different names appear at different times, and multiple names are on this. How did multiple names get on these lists? How can one person receive it multiple times? This is what they're saying at the bottom of my list, multiple times... caregivers, multiple times. That's not right, when we can't even get it once. I don't know if they've changed their name, or if they've changed their places. I don't know how they got it, but some of these people worked in one specific spot.

Mr. Scott Andrews: I can see how confusing and frustrating that would be, and that's why I asked the question.

Can anyone do any analysis of the information you have to come up with some numbers and some names? I was just curious.

Ms. Carletta Matheson: Bette, can you?

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: I have not looked into it. This was Carletta's baby. She asked if she could get certain information and they sent the lists of people who had received cheques from the *ex gratia* payment. The last list she received said something like—

Ms. Carletta Matheson: The caregivers...

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: The "caregivers may appear on the list multiple times". What does that mean? Did the caregivers get three cheques or four or what? We were all caregivers. but we couldn't receive the \$20,000. We just couldn't—

Ms. Carletta Matheson: I have it here.

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: She received the list with her name on it. and up at the top it says "clients who have received a favourable decision for receiving the *ex gratia* payment". Her name was there in black and white, but she never got a cheque.

Ms. Carletta Matheson: I got absolutely nothing. There it is.

Ms. Bette Jean Hudson: So why would her name appear? Why would it say she had received a favourable decision and her name be on the list and she never got any money? These lists need to be looked into. There is something wrong here.

• (1050)

Ms. Margaret Hogan: I have a concern with the list as well. There are individuals on the list who have been proven not to have been living in the area at the time. However, they were able to get two people to sign an affidavit saying they were there, and they were successful applicants.

Another concern I have with those lists is that my name is on the list because, yes, I was successful for my condition. I am here fighting for civilians who can't fight for themselves, and for my mother and my sister-in-law. She lost everything when my brother died unnecessarily.

The issue is that the Access to Information Act is in place to protect people. The Privacy Act is there to protect names. One of the blundering slapstick items I was referring to is that the names on the list should never have been officially released. Who in their right mind would want their name out there, knowing that, yes, they did get the \$20,000? That's a violation of their rights. That goes to show another area in Veterans Affairs where the grave errors continue. Each individual may decide to sue the government for giving out their name. The government went against its own Privacy Act.

That's all I want to say about that. Thank you.

The Chair: Madam Matheson, did you have a quick comment? We have one more questioner, and I'm hoping to have an opportunity to squeeze him in.

Go ahead, Madam Matheson.

Ms. Carletta Matheson: The thing is that when I spoke with one person at Veterans Affairs, first they said there was a typo, then it went from that to their asking if I had sent in for an appeal. I suggested I had sent in for an appeal. They asked if I had it with me at that time. I said that I didn't, and I had to go to look for it. So I didn't give it to them. That day I went looking for my appeal, and it was a lucky thing that I did, because they told me they did not have my appeal. I had this little piece of paper that saved it all. Veterans Affairs said they did not receive an appeal. I called the ombudsman with this little piece of paper. The next day I got a call from Veterans Affairs stating point blank that they had received my appeal.

They're playing around with minds, and I was just shuffled from one person to another. One would say one thing, and one would say another. I said, "Well, she told me to call you back." Do you know what she said to me? "Probably so." This is the answer I got.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Matheson.

Now we'll have the last questioner, Mr. McColeman, for five minutes.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do want to reiterate what the other committee members have said and express our sincere appreciation both for your courage to come here and for the service your husbands provided to our country.

I have a lot of mixed directions here and feelings, because you're advocating on a very emotional level.

Madam Bartlett, I can totally identify with your situation, with your daughter having been born with disabilities. I've spent approximately half my life working with people with disabilities. My son was also born with disabilities and has suffered from cancer and has conditions that are undiagnosed in that no one is able to tell exactly why he is the way he is. Doctors are still experimenting. You're absolutely right.

In my community of Brantford, Ontario, there's an organization called Lansdowne Children's Centre, which serves over 3,000 families that have children with disabilities ranging from mild autism right through to multiple disabilities. Without exception, every one of those parents wants to know the reasons these things happened to their child. For the most part there are no answers, so I can identify with your frustration. I can identify with your situation, and I can identify with those of you who have lost loved ones, because that is part of the culture I have been involved with for a long time.

I bring that to you as the frame of reference for my comments and my desire for you to make comments back, because I don't think I'm going to lead into any specific question.

One comment has been made here and I'd like to know exactly what it means. I'm a new parliamentarian. I was elected just over a year ago, and I was not really involved in politics much before that, by the way. The comment was "you were human first before you came into politics". I'd just like to know what that means.

• (1055)

Ms. Margaret Hogan: I said that because sometimes what we have found in dealing with bureaucracy is that they forget that they were human first, because it's all about policy, power, and ego for some. And it's like saying, "Hey, now, step back aside. You were human first before you came into a position of power." These are issues that are a result of bad policy, but it's the human side of it that you need to look at, the tragedy, the travesty, and what can be done to prevent it.

Mr. Phil McColeman: I totally agree with you. When it comes down to just being a robot reading out of a rule book, you're absolutely right, and I totally agree with you. I just want to clarify for the record that the implication, as I took it, was that I'm somewhat less than human because I got into politics, and I'm not.

Ms. Margaret Hogan: No, I'm not referring to that. I'm talking about the ones we had to deal with who were uncaring, who would make comments to our faces that "we only pay the living". It's those individuals. It's not every one. It's those—and they know who they are—who were rude, who caused widows to cry because of those comments.

Mr. Phil McColeman: I'm going to continue this exchange just quickly.

There is no excuse for disrespect at any level, absolutely not. A lot of your comments today have been about the fact that you felt treated without respect, and there's no excuse for that. I can't excuse a bureaucracy that's been set up on the basis of making it complicated, showing disrespect, and such.

What we hope to do is begin to make changes, and I believe all parties believe this. I don't believe I'm just talking from our side of the table. I believe all parties do. I believe our minister, by starting a program when no government had previously, was attempting a start towards reconciliation on this issue, a start towards something. So I would just make the comment that in the years of advocacy for the groups that I've been involved with for people who've got all kinds of problems, there are different approaches that you can choose to take as a group. There are different approaches that you need to experiment with, and you've decided on your approach, and I respect it. I don't disrespect it whatsoever. I'm just suggesting to you that this

role of advocacy is extremely important, and it's important for us to understand it and understand exactly where it is you want to end up here.

Today is gathering information for us.

The Chair: That's your time, Mr. McColeman, and we're actually pressing very close.

I know Madam Sgro wants to talk about having the department come and respond to this.

Madam Bartlett, I have to gavel this meeting right on time because we have another committee waiting. We have only a couple of minutes left. If there's something you've missed or would like to summarize right at the end here, I can give you two minutes to do that.

Please, go ahead.

Ms. B. Lorraine Bartlett: I just wanted to respond to your comments about you having a disabled child, and so do I. I, too, have worked, since my daughter was born, on the premier's advisory committee for the disabled when we were closing the institutions. I'm on a board now monitoring special needs homes. So I have done that all my life.

You are right, there are no answers. I feel that in my case that's not right. My husband dies of colon cancer; my son gets colon cancer at age 27, plus other health issues as well; and I have a daughter with severe disabilities, so I feel the answer lies in the fact that he was directly sprayed with agent orange or other chemicals in Camp Gagetown. I just wanted to clarify that.

• (1100)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Bartlett.

We have about one minute left, Madam Sgro.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And to all of our witnesses, thank you so very much for sharing this very important information.

I have a motion before the committee today that recommends that the government immediately convene a full and public judicial inquiry into the agent orange tragedy at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown.

What I'd like to suggest, Mr. Chair, is that before voting on that motion we have some other officials come before the committee when we come back at the end of January. I'm not sure if anyone else has anybody, but I think it's important for us to hear possibly both from the minister as well as the departmental officials on this issue before we vote on this particular motion.

The Chair: Our time is up, so I will communicate directly with all committee members and see if there's a consensus. If there's no consensus, we'll debate it when we come back in January, but if there is, then we'll call witnesses at that time.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Chair, I have just one thing. I don't think anyone's going to object to it; otherwise I would ask for us to vote on this today. I just think it makes more sense for us to have some additional information.

The Chair: We have another committee meeting. It's 11 o'clock.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Is anyone objecting to my suggestion?

The Chair: That's why I said I will poll them afterwards.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Why can't we just poll it right now? It would only take on second.

The Chair: I can't, because if we start to get into debate, then people won't have a chance to—

Mr. Robert Oliphant: On a point of order, I'd like it on the record that this is why we asked for this discussion to happen before the last speaker, because we knew we were running out of time. We wanted this discussion with our guests present, but the chair continued to have discussion. I think that's very unfortunate.

The Chair: No, I think that's inaccurate, Mr. Oliphant.

The meeting is adjourned.

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