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Chair

Mr. James Bezan

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• (1620)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC)): We are in public session now. We are only going to have about 10 minutes, so we will do a couple of five-minute rounds.

We have joining us now Mr. Michael Martin, the senior associate deputy minister from the Department of National Defence; Kevin Lindsey, who is no stranger to the committee, the assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer. We also have Rear-Admiral Patrick Finn, who was with us last week; he is chief of staff of the materiel group. Major General Ian Poulter is the chief of programme, and Major-General David Millar is the chief of military personnel.

We are going to skip the opening comments because of our time constraints. We'll go right into our first round of questions.

Mr. Harris, you have five minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

We're glad to have you here, although we would have to say on the record that this is very unsatisfactory, given that last week and this week we have only had a few minutes to discuss the main estimates. This is inadequate. We have a concern about a lot of things about the estimates and a big long list of questions that we had available last week as well as this week.

There's also something that's somewhat pressing involving the ability of the Department of National Defence to actually deliver on programs for Canadian Forces members. We've raised it before with officials from the department and with military personnel, but I think we'd like to have more of a detailed study done on this.

So, Mr. Chair, I would like to move, pursuant to a notice of motion given March 19, 2013:

That the Standing Committee on National Defence undertake a study of the operation of the Canadian Forces home equity assistance program, particularly the Canadian Forces Integrated Relocation Program to reimburse Canadian Forces members who have suffered losses on the sales of their family residence when transferred by the Canadian Forces to other locations, and that the Chair report this Committee's findings and recommendations to the House.

I have that in both official languages, for those who don't have a copy.

Notice of motion has been given on this before, and if you're prepared to rule it in order, Mr. Chair, I'd like to speak to it briefly.

The Chair: Why don't you go on with your questions, Mr. Harris, and then I'll come back to your motion.

Mr. Jack Harris: The motion is related to providing services, so are you going to make a ruling on the motion while I ask a question? Is that it?

The Chair: Yes. I have to do some work on this.

As the chair often does in the House, I will ruminate on this and I'll allow you to go forward with your questions.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

Gentlemen, one of the matters appearing in the estimates this year that is somewhat bothersome, and is stated in fact in the reports on plans and priorities, is that the government is reducing the amount of education reimbursement to regular Canadian Forces members by changing the funding levels for reimbursement to people taking courses.

This program provides a \$2,000 reimbursement for courses that people undertake, and it has been important to a lot of people. General Devlin said in a report that funding available for training has been reduced, resulting in nearly one-third fewer individual training and leadership courses. This is a pretty significant reduction in what's available to Canadian Forces members.

In fact, it goes against what the department said in responding to this committee's report on readiness when it said that the Canadian Forces maintains a significant...and it believes that education of soldiers is important to readiness. That appeared in paragraph 13 of the government's response to this committee's report on readiness.

Can someone tell us why we are reducing the amount of support for individual soldiers who are continuing with education and learning about things that are important to them? For example, and I will quote from section 13:

...the Government continues to make significant investments to ensure the continued delivery of complete spectrum of individual, collective, academic and specialized skills training and development activities.

It recognizes that training is "an essential aspect of the readiness" of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Why are we reducing that? Why do we have General Devlin saying that one-third less training, in that sense, will be offered to individual soldiers?

• (1625)

Mr. Michael Martin (Senior Associate Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence): Thank you for the question, Mr. Chairman.

I'll ask Major-General Millar to respond in detail, but while I have the mike, let me say that this is my first opportunity to address the committee as the associate deputy minister of National Defence. It's a great privilege for me to be here. I look forward to having the opportunity to appear before you on many occasions.

I'll ask General Millar to respond to that question.

Major-General David Millar (Chief of Military Personnel, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In brief, the Canadian Armed Forces have an individual training and education process for all our trades and our officer classifications. Our trades in particular, which are really the hands-on—our infanteers, our aircraft mechanics, our sailors aboard ship—have a very thorough and well-developed program that trains them in the specific skills and qualifications they need to perform the war-fighting capabilities of the Canadian Forces.

We have a degree officer program for our officer corps. For both our non-commissioned members and our officers, the succession development training and education throughout a career adds to the basic training, whether it be their officer degree program from either RMC or a university, or for our NCMs, the training they receive, their trades training.

That education throughout their career can vary and include such things as language training, additional skills, and qualifications to training as the member increases in rank and experience.

Sir, the particular program you mentioned, education reimbursement, is in addition to the training and education provided by the Canadian Armed Forces to maintain the necessary capabilities of our non-commissioned members and our officers.

When we refer to “education reimbursement”, we are talking about education that our particular officers or NCMs would like to pursue to enhance their own education acumen, not necessarily in direct relation to the requirements for them to perform their jobs and their missions. That type of education can range from a business administration degree to enhancing education in areas of personal interest, such as consulting or administration.

Mr. Jack Harris: Can I ask specifically how much is being reduced? I know it's being reduced and I understand the reason why.

The Chair: Mr. Harris, unfortunately I'm not going to allow you to ask that question or to respond. Your time is up, plus bells are ringing.

Standing Order 115(5) says that to continue a meeting, I require consensus to allow the committee to meet. Do I have consensus to allow us to meet through bells?

An hon. member: No.

The Chair: No, I have no consent.

It's a half-hour bell. There are going to be 15 minutes of voting, but by coming back here it's going to be well after quarter to. With that, I'm going to ask for a motion to adjourn.

● (1630)

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): So moved.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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