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Chair

Mr. Neil Ellis

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.)): We will call to order meeting number 94, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), on the study of the needs and issues specific to indigenous veterans.

I welcome everybody back for the first meeting. I hope everybody had an enjoyable summer.

Today, I'd like to welcome three new members to the committee. We have Shaun Chen, MP for Scarborough North, and Karen Ludwig, MP for New Brunswick Southwest. Welcome to the committee. We also have a new parliamentary secretary, Stéphane Lauzon.

Last spring, the committee began its first study on the needs and issues specific to indigenous veterans. We've held six meetings and heard 26 witnesses. We did a trip in May to Nova Scotia, Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. Another one, as we are all aware, is planned to Yellowknife in the week of October 20, in relation to the study.

Today, we are pleased to welcome the Métis National Council. They were supposed to appear by video conference but have decided to appear in person. Welcome.

From the Manitoba Métis Federation, I'd like to introduce Mr. David Chartrand, minister of veteran affairs, and Al Benoit, chief of staff.

We'll start with 10 minutes of your testimony and then open it up to questions.

Thank you.

Mr. David Chartrand (Minister of Veteran Affairs, Métis National Council): Thank you very much, Neil. You and I have something in common. We have an accent issue—with Métis, and different names.

As the Métis nation, of course, we're very honoured to be here before each of you to bring the message from our veterans.

I should take the time to reflect quickly before I start. The Métis National Council represents the Métis nation of the homeland, which is parts of western Ontario and all the way into parts of British Columbia, parts of the United States, and of course into the Northwest Territories. That's our traditional, historical homeland. Our people have lived there for several hundred years now, without hesitation, developing our entrepreneurial development.

I'm sure most of you know history, and history has taught us different things throughout time. At one time, the person we see as our great leader was called a traitor in this country, and now he's a father of Manitoba, properly being recognized for who he is, Louis Riel. The Métis government is established from Ontario to British Columbia. I am one of the presidents of the board of governors of the Métis National Council. I'm also vice-president of the Métis National Council, and I am president of the Manitoba Métis Federation.

We have an estimated population of about 400,000 in western Canada. Our governments have amassed, I would say, close to 1,500 employees across the homeland. In Manitoba alone we have 750 employees, and we also of course manage all types of programs and services for our citizens. Most of it is economically done through our own businesses. We run a lot of businesses, and we make a lot of revenue in our businesses. We're very successful that way.

We also had a great heartache in history with this country. When we joined Canada in 1870, we did so on the promise of certain things given to us. As history will show, we finally won the Supreme Court ruling on the land claims in 2013, but it set the stage for the struggle we face now, close to 150 years since 1870, which is just two years away.

The Métis nation is probably one of the most written-about people, in the sense of Louis Riel and our history, but we have had a turbulent past trying to find ourselves and where we fit in Canada.

It's interesting. I don't usually read speeches. I speak from what I know. I call a spade a spade when I see one. I'm not afraid to stand up for what I believe in. I have a prepared speech here. I do apologize for those who speak French. We don't have any French translators working for us, although a lot of our people speak French. I speak Ojibway, personally. We're a multilingual nation. The language we created, which is now recognized, is called Michif. It's a combination of French, Cree and Ojibway. It was created by our peoples and it's studied by others all across the world. They come to study how we created that language.

Let me start by thanking each of you for giving me the opportunity to appear before your committee. In my capacity as the Métis National Council's minister of veteran affairs and as president of the Manitoba Métis Federation, I do so with mixed feelings. I have a sense of optimism that a settlement for our Second World War veterans may soon be at hand, one that acknowledges the disadvantages and discrimination they faced on their return to Canada, which denied their chances of demobilizing as successfully as other Second World War veterans. I have a heavy heart that this settlement has taken so long to take shape that the vast majority of Second World War heroes are no longer with us today. That time is running out for a few of them. There are only a few still alive in western Canada.

Be careful with my accent. I don't have an “h”, yet I don't speak French.

To understand the scope of the Métis nation's involvement in Canada's war effort, I encourage you to visit the National Métis Veterans' Memorial Monument in Batoche, Saskatchewan. We just erected that several years ago. I'm sure most of you know what Batoche is. I'm sure I don't have to repeat myself, but just in case, Batoche is where the last historic battles took place between the Métis nation and Canada. We won two of the skirmishes and lost the last one. At that time, of course, not long after, our leader was hanged.

First unveiled in July 2014, the monument honours and commemorates the wartime service of our Métis nation patriots, starting with those who fought under the leadership of Louis Riel and the military command of Gabriel Dumont, at Batoche. The last battle of our North-West Resistance was in 1885, and only about 30 years later, Canada called us for the Great War.

● (1540)

For the First World War, our country called upon our boys to fight and our women to serve in the medical corps.

I want people to reflect on that thought for a second. Imagine somebody attacking you, coming into your territory—into your homes—and attacking your families. Not long after—it was 30 years later—they're knocking on your door and asking you to come fight for them, to go fight someone you don't even know. That's really what happened there. It's good to see that our people didn't hesitate. We joined in great numbers in World War I to go fight on behalf of Canada, to fight those we didn't even know in order to protect democracy and freedom.

These patriots fought for the rights and dignity of the Métis nation, and out of thirst for justice and the protection of our way of life. Despite our defeat at Batoche, the execution of our leader, our dispossession and dispersion, and our marginalization on the fringes of society, the Métis response when Canada came under threat was immediate and profound.

The initial engraving on the monument has the names of more than 5,000 Métis nation veterans, most of them from the Second World War. We also have some names of veterans who fought in the 1885 battles, in Batoche. We also have those from the Korean War, and of course we have recruits still today in the war that is taking place in the eastern part of our world.

Recruitment was so high in the Métis communities that it had to be suspended when it threatened local economies. Our young men and boys attended in mass numbers. In my village alone, I know there were so many who left. Some never came home; others came home damaged, of course, with one arm or one leg, but we all know what happened to them. They were left to fend for themselves.

Why did so many join the defence of our country during the Second World War? Of course, for some there was an element of intrigue and adventure that played into the decision to serve overseas. Perhaps it was the opportunity for meaningful employment at a time when job prospects for Métis in the Prairies were bleak. However, knowing these men and women as I do, I know that what principally drove them was an intense desire to combat the scourge of fascism and help create a better world and a better Canada—a Canada where they would no longer be targets of continued discrimination and racism, and where they would have an equal opportunity to pursue a livelihood and build better lives for themselves, their families and their communities.

Were their hopes and expectations met when they were released from service? Tragically, they were not. The new Canada they fought for was not to be.

I have been the minister for this file for over 15 years. I've been battling this issue with Canada, to try to find a solution, and to deal properly with those who came home. So many promises were made to them when they left—that they would have an economic start and a new beginning if they survived, and that Canada would be there for them.

Let me tell you, I've seen many of those whom we call elders now, at that age in their lives, cry in front of me—which made me cry—when telling me their stories of how they were treated when they got home. Basically they were told to go back to their traplines. Even when challenging them, they said these young bureaucrats used different language, or let's say much harsher language: “You were there for only three months. Do you think your work has this much value? You think we should be giving you....” These were the kinds of things that were said to them at the time. Of course, they walked away and never went back, because of the way they were treated.

I saw them, and I heard them express the hurt in their hearts. That was not what was supposed to happen to them when they got home. They were supposed to be helped; there was supposed to be someone taking care of them. There was supposed to be somebody giving them another chance to rebuild their lives. Of course, that didn't happen. I have met with every government sitting around this table on this issue. You can go back in your history and see I have met with you and your government in some capacity.

The new Canada they fought for was not to be for them when they returned. In 1995, one of our veterans told the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples that when he was discharged in 1945, he wanted to work for the post office, because he liked the uniform and the way the employees were treated. This is the 1995 study done by the Senate itself. I have a copy, and I'll leave it here if people want to access it afterwards. The veteran stated, “The most important thing I wanted to do was to join the post office and be a letter carrier. The one thing that blocked me was that I was a half breed and they would not take me.”

Accessing veterans' benefits would prove particularly problematic for Métis. Another of our veterans told the Senate committee:

> All the benefits were advertised on radio and in the newspapers, but I never saw a newspaper where I lived, nor did we have a radio. We were remote. The first gravel road we had there was in 1959.

At an earlier meeting, the same veteran had said that most Métis veterans were “not informed of education and land benefits, or of low interest loans that were available for housing and business start-ups.” He said many Métis veterans “could not read English, but the department did not make applications available in Cree, Michif or French.”

● (1545)

As I told you earlier in my comments, many of the people in our villages are fluent in French, and that's what their main language is. The Royal Canadian Legion was another source of potential information, but our veterans told the committee that they lived far from the nearest branch and did not join or become members for many years after their war service. Those Métis veterans did not learn about benefits and sometimes were denied the full use of benefits. This was the case for Alberta and Saskatchewan Métis who wanted to take up veteran land grants and were instead told to move into collectively held Métis settlements or Métis farms. They were not able to access the $6,000 loan that was made available to veterans settling on private property.

I can remember it as clearly as if it were yesterday. I met with our veterans who spoke of their struggles and how they felt about being promised economic development opportunities upon arrival back home. Some shed tears. They described vividly how there were two lines. First, if they were dark enough, they were told to go to the first nation line—the word they used at the time was "Indian". I'm just being more diplomatic. Once there, they were refused and told they were not “Indians”. They were told to go to the “white” line. Again, they were refused. They had nowhere to go. That's how they best described themselves when they were trying to find where to go. At that time, Canada still did not recognize the Métis people as a rights-bearing people, and in fact denied their existence. That's been a challenge for our nation for quite a long time. Truly, there was no line. That is the best way to describe their experience. I'll never forget those tears.

How did our veterans respond to this treatment? Some resumed the roles they had played before the war in organizing our communities and leading our political associations that were working for rights, recognition and improvements to our people's social and economic conditions. Others, amidst poor housing and living conditions in cities and remote areas, succumbed to despair and alcohol.

When Canada finally took action to redress the issue of indigenous peoples' access to and just receipt of veterans' benefits, our veterans were denied justice once again. In 2002, Canada set aside $39 million for first nation veterans packages in response to claims of differential treatment under the Veterans Charter. For the Métis, it provided some funding to research grievances concerning Métis access to post-discharge benefits, then cited privacy issues to deny us access to the information we needed to support the claims.

In fact, it's ironic. I remember this vividly. That deputy minister is no longer with us, and he's gone to another world, but when I was meeting with Albina—she was the minister at the time, and the Liberal Party was in control—we seemed to be making some progress toward a potential discussion on a settlement like the first nations one. I can't tell you enough—I saw it with my own eyes, and my reputation is very powerful so I do not say things without them being true—how adamantly the deputy opposed it. I will never know—he died of cancer after—what happened and why he was so adamantly opposed to the Métis. He would not allow us to look at files, as the first nations study did. We had the same consultant who did the first nations study, but we were not allowed to randomly select files so we could show the systemic discrimination. I will never know, and probably nobody will ever know, why he was so against the Métis. He did not allow us the chance to prove that systemic discrimination did take place and to provide clear evidence that the Métis were not treated as fairly and as equitably as others.

The first ray of hope for recognition came on Remembrance Day 2009, after many years of discussion and battles. That ended the discussion that day; it seemed to die. In the discussions it seemed that the Liberal Party and government at the time were supportive of moving toward some kind of discussion and possible settlement, but the fight with the bureaucracy.... They were just too powerful. I think the government just gave up hope on it because the department was so adamantly opposed to it.

The first ray of hope for recognition came on Remembrance Day 2009, when indigenous affairs minister Chuck Strahl and I led a delegation of Métis nation D-Day veterans back to the beaches of Normandy and the Juno Beach Centre. There, at the Métis Veterans' Memorial at the Juno Beach Centre, our heroes were honoured by the Government of Canada, represented by Mr. Strahl, and by citizens of France.

The memorial features the Red River cart, one of the most recognizable symbols of the Métis nation. Before that, though, we went to the first opening at Juno Beach. I encourage any of you who have not seen it to go. The feeling that embraces you upon knowing how many of our young boys died there, at the shores and as they went into battle.... Some of them were taken. One is still alive in Manitoba. He was taken prisoner after he parachuted too far and too deep. You start looking at Juno Beach. We walked there. We raised $100,000 on our own as the Métis government, and we took a large delegation of survivors from Juno Beach. When we got there, it was clear to us that there was great pride. We first went to all of the graveyards to show our respect and honour, and we did prayers throughout the different graveyards we visited. They went to visit a lot of their own friends—they call them brothers—and stopped by their gravestones and prayed for them.

● (1550)

Finally, on the first day when we were going to cut the ribbon and walk in there, to me they were like children. I saw such enthusiasm, such excitement, that they were going to walk into this museum and their story would be told, that they had been there fighting for people they didn't even know, and fighting for a country that was not very good to them.

When the ribbon-cutting ceremony happened—because nobody had been allowed to look inside—we walked in and there wasn't one artifact that described the Métis nation, not one. It was all first nations' artifacts. Outside there was an inukshuk for the Inuit, and I don't know how many Inuit were in World War II. I don't know if any went, but there was not one piece of evidence that the Métis were there fighting for our country and fighting for the world.

So we worked very hard, and at the time Chuck Strahl understood—and he's still my friend today—that something had to be done, and we were able to put the Red River cart there. We took a second delegation there five years later, but by that time many had already died and they didn't have a chance to see that history and that we had corrected the wrong that was done by the museum in the exhibits that were there.

Today the Métis history sits on Juno Beach. We checked on it to make sure it's still there and that they will not put away our historic message so that people throughout the world who come will know that the people of our nation went to fight for them.

The best way to describe that story is to say that I've seen some non-indigenous-looking people—I'll use that phrase and it's not in a negative way—praying with their children. I thought it was all Canadians who were buried there, so I thought I would talk to them just in case they knew any of our Métis people. I asked if they had relatives here because these were all Canadian graveyards. They said they didn't. I asked why they were praying to these headstones here. He said he had come here when he was little and his dad had brought him. They used to come to pray here for these people who didn't even know them but fought for them and died for them and gave them the freedom they enjoy today. It touched my heart when I heard that, so I teach my children today that they must honour these people who lie under this ground, who gave their lives for our freedom and didn't even know us.

That is the passion of the heart that I would have expected our country to have when our veterans returned from the Second World War, but that truly wasn't the same for the Métis.

Highlighting the contribution of the Métis soldiers, sailors and aircrew drowned during the world war and during the Canadian landing at Juno Beach in 1944, the veterans who spoke at the Senate committee more than 20 years ago, during the 1995 study, were then part of a group numbering in the thousands. The year 2020 will mark the 150th anniversary of when the Métis brought Manitoba and the rest of the western prairies into the Canadian Confederation.

In our history and the history of this country, all our Métis battles were to protect the rights of our people and all Canadians. The Métis are patriots of Canada, always have been and always will be, even though our country has at times forsaken us. Canada cannot continue to forsake our World War II veterans. They sacrificed their families and much of their lives to fight for liberty and freedom, which many didn't fully have before they left for war, and didn't have when they returned home.

Today I speak to you on behalf of the few hundred who are still alive. As the Métis nation's minister of veteran affairs, I and Minister O'Regan have been working on a package for veterans that we can hopefully conclude in the near future. I cannot emphasize enough that time is truly of the essence. I encourage this committee to support the completion and delivery of this package to bring justice and respect to those who sacrificed so much in World War II. We have always honoured, respected and supported our veterans who have served in Korea, Afghanistan and on other peacekeeping missions, and who today continue to sacrifice for our great country.

Why do we make that statement? If you look at what Canada has attempted to do with respect to the wrongs of the past, they did deal with the first nations. They gave every veteran $20,000, based on what was truly promised after their return in 1945. They also settled with the Japanese and Chinese to settle the wrongdoing they believe Canada had done to them during the war.

● (1555)

If you look, too, at the non-indigenous society—no disrespect to them—some still feel that they have not been properly served justice. All governments and all parties are trying to resolve it. At the end of the day, though, we know for a fact that the Métis, without question, were left to fend for themselves, go back to their traplines, and deal with issues. We are trying to seek justice here, to find a way that things will be done right, so that this country can say it's dealt with these people who went out to fight so that we all enjoy the freedoms we enjoy today.

If it's still something you struggle with, I'd ask you to reflect upon the thought of seeing your son or daughter go out at 18 or 19 years old to fight for a country, to be promised something, and to come home to find nothing waiting for them when they return. That tells me that there's a lot this country still needs to resolve and fix. I know that on the Métis nation side, there are still a lot of hard feelings out there. It hurts. We are actually doing our own monuments right now ourselves across Manitoba. We're paying for it ourselves through fundraising and so forth. We have some beautiful monuments honouring our veterans.

I'm announcing at my assembly that I myself, as a government, want to give all living veterans $20,000. It's for those who are still alive so that we can at least show honour to them before they leave. I don't want us to thank them after they're gone. I don't want us to say we're sorry after they're gone. I want us to tell them we're sorry right now, while some of them are still alive. There are very few alive and they're all, of course, in their late 80s and 90s. It's time for this country to do what's just and what's right.

I ask all the parties here today to support this cause and support the issue so that at the end of the day these veterans be treated with the dignity they deserve. They gave us something that we are fortunate to have today.

That is my presentation, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will start with questions. Rounds are six minutes.

We'll start with Ms. Wagantall.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much, David, for your presentation today. We've had the opportunity, as you probably know, to travel as a committee to some locations and talk specifically about first nations, Inuit and Métis issues. I'm from Saskatchewan—

● (1600)

Mr. David Chartrand: Okay, good.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: —and we did go up to Beauval, Saskatchewan. We had wonderful meetings there with the Métis community.

This has been a learning experience for me. I deeply value what you're sharing with us and take it very much to heart. *From Vimy to Juno* is a presentation and program travelling the country. It's in my riding and I'll be going there. I'll be very careful to look and see that the Métis are properly recognized in that presentation across our country, recognizing our soldiers from the two world wars.

You mentioned some research that was done. You had the same consultant working with the Métis as with first nations, but because of privacy issues you were prevented from getting details to support claims. What's happened with that?

Mr. David Chartrand: That was the last study attempted to be done. Canada was seeking a way to justify, I guess, its process to come to a conclusion on why settlements should take place. Of course, it was leading to a financial settlement. A trust was actually created for the first nations, because most veterans had already passed on. That money went into a trust. Canada was going to look at trying to find a way to justify the purpose or why a settlement of this nature would take place. They would probably take it to Treasury Board or take it to cabinet. The study was to show exactly what had happened to first nations, that there was systemic discrimination without hesitation.

That's why I said I found it remarkable that.... I was sitting in that room. The deputy would not even leave when the minister asked the deputy to leave. I've never seen this, and I've been in politics for 22 years. When the minister asked the deputy to leave—I think she wanted to talk to the veterans and me in private—he would not get off his chair. I'm telling you that I'm not making this up. I was shocked. I was staring. I couldn't believe it. Only until she raised her voice at a very high tone did he finally get off his chair. He wanted to continue to stay in there, because he felt, I guess....

I don't know. I still don't know why he had such adamant opposition to this. I don't understand and never will. Why was he...? I don't know. He didn't do that for first nations. In fact, with the first nations study they were very open to allowing the consultant to go in and randomly select different files so they could do a random sample to come to a conclusion, using some kind of science formula. For some reason, he wouldn't allow that for us. His argument, his position was that all the Métis got what they deserved. They got the stuff they were promised. That was his position and it stayed that way.

We can't even ask him now, because he is no longer in this world.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Okay. That's unfortunate.

Mr. David Chartrand: Yes.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: You talked about the issues with the bureaucracy of the day. This is something I think that, if we're all really honest around this table.... It's a challenge for those who serve in government roles to turn, as they sometimes say, a dinosaur around on a dime.

Do you feel that this played a significant role in the challenges that you faced?

Mr. David Chartrand: For sure. Without question, bureaucracy is a very powerful creature in governments, including my government. At the end of the day, when you look at it, it's emphasized sometimes that you have to convince them a lot more than you have to convince a minister.

It becomes challenging when not enough education is obtained inside their departments. They don't take the time to really understand why this matter is before them or before both the minister and opposition side, like me. They don't understand why we're bringing forward an argument or a position. They seem to find a defence for why it shouldn't happen instead of why it should happen. I think we find that in many bureaucracies.

The challenge, I think, is still.... I think we've slowly passed that now, but it's taken that time frame, since the Chrétien time. If you look at that time frame, the wheel is slowly turning, and they are beginning to understand that there is unfinished business with the Métis.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Do I have a little time?

The Chair: You have a minute and 20 seconds.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: It red-flagged for me this issue where you're having to create, pay for and put up your own monuments. I know that one was erected just recently in Beauval, and there was some government funding for that.

Have you approached the government?

● (1605)

Mr. David Chartrand: I'd go back to your earlier question about bureaucracy and red tape.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Okay.

Mr. David Chartrand: We've embarked upon.... For example, we're also pushing with Canada right now to get this resolved. There are still many veterans out there without headstones. That was one of the promises that were made.

Getting support from governments for monuments is a challenging thing because of the government funding situation and bureaucracy, more than anything, more than the minister. I know that the previous minister who was there for the Liberal government indicated that he would like to work with me on the headstone issue and on monuments. When I asked my staff to get on track with that, because of the bureaucracy, I could already see what was going to happen. The red tape was there.

These people are dying on us. I wanted to show them honour before they left us, so we've built two beautiful monuments already in Manitoba. We have a very strong economic engine in Manitoba. We make some very good revenue in our businesses, so we funded it ourselves. I was later approached by the government, which said, “Look, we want to get involved.” I said, “Look, you become involved when you show me you are actually able to become involved and I don't have to wait a year or two and go through bureaucracy to get in a concurrence. We have a partnership."

We'll still continue to build monuments on our own. If the government wants to come in, then we'll welcome them in, but I'm not going to take a year of work trying to get $10,000. It costs me more than $10,000 to try to get that $10,000.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Yes, I hear you.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Eyolfson, go ahead.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

It's good to see you again, David.

Welcome, Al. I'm sorry, is that backwards? Is Al...?

Mr. Al Benoit (Chief of Staff, Manitoba Metis Federation): It's a perfectly bilingual name.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: I meant that I wasn't sure if it was your first or last name.

Mr. Al Benoit: My first name is Al.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Okay, good. I thought so.

It's good to see you again.

As you know, as we grew up in Winnipeg, the name Tommy Prince is very well known to us. We should all look back and think he's the pride of Winnipeg, which he is. But we all know his fate, and there's a sense of collective shame because of how he ended his days. That is why I'm glad we're doing this study, because we know there are so many indigenous veterans who were not well served in the way they really deserved to be.

I'm hearing the stories I've heard before, and I'm hearing these stories now. It is quite shameful.

You're talking about the events, as you said, with the World War II vets. Over time, has there been an improvement, particularly with the vets who returned from more recent conflicts, such as Korea, the peacekeeping of the 1990s, or Afghanistan? Are things improving in the way Métis vets, in particular, are being treated?

Mr. David Chartrand: They are far better than they were after World War II. I'll tell you that. At least there is some condition of recognition, and there are programs—or attempted programs, at least—to try to serve them.

But it's the psychological effects that people are not aware of. When we were walking at Juno Beach, going to a graveyard, two veterans, one first nation and one Métis, stopped and burst out crying, and we didn't know why. We were all in shock. We stopped and were looking, thinking, “What's going on?” What came to their minds when they were both together walking was when they had come across two children, half-naked, dirty, cold, and wet—it was raining—and they did not and were not allowed to stop because they had to go to the front of the lines. They could not stop to save those children. They cried so loud there—everybody stopped and formed a circle—and they said they had kind of been judge and jury and had played God. They left these kids to die, and they know in their hearts these kids died. That's what they felt. They've suffered through that mindset all their lives, and they drank. Both of them became alcoholics. At the end of the day, they stopped that—they went into evangelism or first nations spirituality—but for most of their lives they were alcoholics after World War II. You start thinking about that.

That is the missing piece of what happened to many of our veterans when they returned. People don't realize that. They're probably in the most dangerous positions in life, and they sometimes have to take people's lives or judge an action that costs someone else's life. They can't get that out of their heads. They can't get that out of their minds, and if they don't have the programs and services to deal with that, then we leave them to fend for themselves. A lot of them will turn to alcohol or some other form to stop that pain in their heads. I can say openly that so many World War II veterans—Métis veterans—faced that when they came home. There are so many in our communities who were alcoholics, and a lot of them were very abusive alcoholics, because there was so much anger inside them following that.

That's why we're so upset with Canada, that it didn't deal with them. It didn't even try to solve it. It didn't even try to apologize to them. There's never been an apology in this country yet to the Métis nation because we did not respect their return. We didn't give them the head start they were promised when they returned. We did not deal with them. We did not sit down and try to help them. We told them to go back to their traplines. In fact, as I said, some of them were even challenged, "You think you served long enough to get any support?" Some of them didn't last a day. Some of them were killed immediately upon being dropped off.

If you look at Mr. Godon, he still suffers from trauma today. At least Canada did help him with the psychological and medical stuff, but it never compensated him. He was a prisoner of war after Juno Beach. As I said, he parachuted too far inside. They tortured him there. He said that in the morning they'd get up and one would get shot. He said, "I think they didn't kill me because I spoke French. They probably thought I was from France, so they didn't kill me, but they'd choose different ones they would take out and shoot." He had to live with that. He still lives with that today, and, again, nobody's ever said sorry to him.

● (1610)

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: You made some reference to how the Métis were falling between the definitions of first nations and all others. Is there still that problem, that Métis vets are feeling like they're stuck in the middle, between systems or between identities, when they're trying to access their services and support as veterans?

Mr. David Chartrand: We've changed that a lot in this country. There's no doubt in the prairies that you're either Métis or you're first nation. There is no such thing as non-status. I hear that phrase all the time, and I don't know what that is. In the west, the prairies, you're either part of the Métis nation or you're part of a first nation.

There's a clear, distinct position now that has evolved throughout time in bureaucracies of government. No matter which party has been in, the same position has been taken on the Métis, which is that we're not part of any fiduciary legal relationship with Canada. We were locked out of any relationship with INAC, Indian Affairs, even Health Canada—all of them. However, since Daniels, all that has changed. There's a shift of a circle coming and indigenous governments are being given the respect that's been owing to them.

I can say openly anywhere that I'm very, very proud today in this country. The Métis nation is finally finding its place in Confederation. It's taken us a long damn time to get here, and I can't wait to make sure that it's resolved during my time. I've been elected in seven elections. I serve for four years and three months. We have a province-wide election by ballot. I've been serving now for 22 years as president.

My background is that I come from the Department of Justice. I have a doctorate and was given an honorary doctorate from.... I have tons of awards from everywhere for all my years of service and work.

However, there's nothing more important to me. That's why I wanted to come here for this file too. I have an assembly happening right now; it starts tomorrow morning. I have 3,000 delegates coming from across Manitoba, and we have one of the biggest gatherings in western Canada. The Métis nation of MMF is a very powerful government in the west.

I wanted to come here personally for this, to send as powerful a message as I can to you that you do not give this up. I don't want a study taking three years, five years, or 10 years and you guys deciding that now we think we should do right when there's not a veteran alive. You can keep your study. You can keep your promise. You can keep anything you want, because you've already missed the opportunity to say "I'm sorry." That's what I can't see go through here and missing a chance like this. There are so few left alive, and if we don't fix this problem, this wrong, then we all deserve to live with that shame.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. MacGregor, for six minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, Mr. Chartrand. I'm here on behalf of my friend and colleague Gord Johns, who serves as our Veterans Affairs critic. On his behalf, I would like to extend a warm welcome and thank you for your statements.

Mr. David Chartrand: Thank you.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I know it's a pretty sordid history when you spell it out like that. It's something that we definitely need to hear. I just want to let you know that I was personally struck by your going through that.

Ultimately in this committee, we want to produce that report, and we don't want it to just be filed away, so we want to get down to some specifics.

Given the unique demographic and geographic nature of the Métis nation, can you maybe elaborate for us a bit on whether the Métis veterans have any unique service requirements. I'm thinking in terms of language or different programs that we could be recommending.

Mr. David Chartrand: Some of the key things include the fact that we're a multilingual nation. As you've seen in the 1995 report, there's some talk about how they didn't get newspapers or television, and at the same time they spoke a different language. Sometimes we forget that if....

Even when I speak, I assure you I can turn from speaking at a university level to speaking at a grade 9 level just like this, because that's who my audience is. A lot of the time when I speak in my own province, I speak at a grade 9 level to my people. The schooling of a lot of these veterans— these seniors and elders—has been very limited, so we try to address matters at a level they can understand. Even when Ottawa was trying to send documents at the time, trying to resolve these things or help them, they didn't understand them. Nobody spoke to them.

Think of the hypocrisy of it. We're a multilingual nation. We have a very large French-speaking population in part of our nation, and we don't get one cent in French language translation, yet, by law, we're supposed to translate. That's why I apologized earlier. I was supposed to bring two documents, one in English and one in French.

If services are to come, I think the best way to approach it is to recognize that this is the reason we have a government. Our Métis government knows exactly where people live. We know exactly what their issues are and we know exactly how to address them. You can go to functions anywhere you want in Manitoba, but you may not get a real taste of what is happening if you don't know who you should speak to and how you should speak to those people. That's the function of our Métis government. We do it better than anybody else. We have, as I said, the most powerful government. You'll see 3,000 people attending my assembly.

It's good to express it. I thank you for your question. I encourage you if you want to do that, if you want to work with our Métis governments. We're out there. We have offices right across the province. We have institutions of locals, which constitute the voice of the community. We can trace and bring those people to a meeting that you really want, and we can, if necessary, translate for you. Some people still are very fluent. I speak very fluent Saulteaux—Ojibwe, which is the same common language with just a bit of a different accent. It's the same thing, Ojibwe and Saulteaux. Our people are Michif speakers and Cree speakers, depending on what part of the province you're going into.

You just said something about your study. This is a 1995 study. That's a long time ago, you guys. There was already evidence of injustice happening again. This is 2018, and 2019 is coming around the corner. As I said, you only have a handful of veterans still alive in the Métis nation. If you're going to do a study and the recommendations are going to be similar to this again, this study did help the first nations. They came to a conclusion, to a resolution of their matters, and a settlement occurred.

I'm encouraging this country and I've been working with Minister O'Regan to try to get this thing resolved once and for all. I came close three times in this country, even with Strahl. Strahl and I are still good friends to this day and always will be friends. He understood, but he still couldn't get the support to get to the next level, to get towards a settlement and to dealing an apology to these Métis veterans. They kept not allowing.... Indigenous to them was good enough.

First nations are not us. We're completely different people, and so are the Inuit, so just because you've dealt with one indigenous people doesn't mean you've dealt with all of us. I think it's important for you to realize that.

The Métis nation has never been dealt with properly in this country. They fought for you. They fought for your families. They fought for your children and for those they didn't even know. Imagine that. Thirty years after you attacked us in Batoche and killed us in Batoche and did a lot of damage to our future and hanged our leader, we still came to fight for you. Nobody has ever said “Thank you”. Nobody has ever come out to express, “How can we help you? How can we fix the wrongs?”

If you can fix that, I think you'll do justice for yourselves and for your families.

● (1615)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Is there anything you can add to that with respect to Métis veterans who are living in remote communities? Is there anything you want to say about the services that exist or how we should change them for remote communities?

Mr. David Chartrand: With today's technology, why are we still struggling to find headstones for some who don't have them? That is the stupidest thing that we can.... With the big government with all the intellect and genius we have, we still can't resolve a process to ensure that every veteran promised a headstone will get one. My dad is one of them. He doesn't have a headstone. You start looking at that. I purposely didn't give him a headstone. I buy headstones for all my family, but I didn't put one for him because I think he deserves that headstone. There are so many out there who don't have headstones and yet, to this day in 2018, we still can't find a way to solve it.

It's the same thing when we go through these processes of trying to establish recognition and honour. I didn't waste my time trying to apply for money, because I knew it would take me too long to go through the bureaucracy. It would take me too long to get a “yes” from somebody, so I just went on my own. They're costing us good money. I'm telling you that elders and veterans are fundraising themselves. They're having little barbecues and little bingo nights. It makes me so proud, and I give them back their money and I pay for it all. They still want to put something in there because it honours them that they're doing justice for their brothers and sisters, which is what they call themselves. Again, why is there so much red tape to fix a simple problem? If you answer that, you solve the problem. Then we have no problem.

● (1620)

The Chair: Mr. Bratina, you have six minutes.

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks for coming in. It's always better than the screen. It's good to have the screen, but I admire you for wanting to meet with us to look us in the eye and talk about these issues.

Cathay and I, and other members, had the opportunity to go to Beauval. I put a picture on my Facebook page of 98-year-old Louis Roy, and I got the biggest response I've ever had on Facebook. He was a Second World War veteran who walked 110 miles to enlist. He lost his best friend in Italy. A lot of those guys had enlisted. His story was really touching, because he came back and walked 110 miles back to Beauval and went back into the bush to his trapline. He didn't know any of the benefits.

I have a couple of questions. Do you have an accurate number of Métis veterans?

Mr. David Chartrand: Throughout probably the last two decades, we've been working to formulate the issues and concerns of our veterans. In several books that have been developed, we've catalogued all the veterans we possibly can know of. As I said in my earlier comments, we have 5,000 veterans' names on the Batoche monument. It's a big monument, and I think Canada did help with it. A lot of it was about getting fundraising. MMF itself put $35,000 as a government. From there we can definitely extract all the World War II veterans' names.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Is there much dialogue between Métis and first nations with regard to indigenous veterans' issues? Are you talking at any level?

Mr. David Chartrand: When we talk about veterans, there is no discrepancy on bloodline. Let's put it that way. Whether non-indigenous or indigenous, to them they're all brothers. They have a very good working relationship and dialogue, but again, it hurts when one is being treated differently, when one gets a settlement and the other one gets nothing. Still it doesn't stop their friendships. They're still friends and brothers, and they do support each other when it comes to helping on matters such as the monuments and fundraising or helping when a veteran passes on. We raise money to make sure the person is given the greatest honour during a funeral service.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Are there any Métis veterans beyond the Canadian borders? Are there any in the United States? Did many of them enlist in the United States?

Mr. David Chartrand: Some of them actually tried to cross because they wanted to enlist so badly. For some reason, they wouldn't take them here, so they went to the American side to enlist. I've already heard many a time about their walking such great distances.

Some of them were lying in their application. They were only 16 and they tried to say they were 18 so they could go with their friends. I don't know if they knew about the horror and terror they were heading into, but they were willing to put their names forward as teenagers. Some of them got caught and were disallowed, but some of them did get in. I think Mr. Godon tried at 16 and got in at 17. He lied in his application about his age.

If you look at our people, you see some of them went to the United States. Just so you get a better grip on it, if you look at last names in the United States in Belcourt, North Dakota, and other places, you see they're our names. They're the last names of Métis people in Manitoba and the prairies. They're called the Chippewa tribe in the United States because they don't know of Métis recognition in the United States. If you go to their band offices, all you'll see is Métis artifacts everywhere. In fact, the first Michif dictionary, which is the language created by our people, comes from Belcourt, North Dakota. Some of us are actually Métis citizens but American civilians because we joined from that side, but they're our people.

Mr. Bob Bratina: I had concerns about your comments with regard to monuments and headstones. I looked up the numbers, and in our budget we provide $24.4 million over five years to clean, repair and replace grave markers and so on. Headstones are available through the Last Post Fund, which is out of Veterans Affairs.

Do you have an accurate flow of information available to Métis veterans about the benefits available to them?

● (1625)

Mr. David Chartrand: No, we definitely don't have that type of situation in our office. We don't have staff who work directly with our veterans, for example, but I think most of that resource is spent on military graveyards. You talk about Beauval. You talk about different places. Further north, you're going to Pinehouse or stuff like that, and the graveyards in Saskatchewan or Manitoba. If you go even further north, they're going to be burying them in their community, not in a military graveyard.

Yes, the military graveyards are impeccable: I give Canada credit for that. The most beautiful graveyards I've ever seen are in Europe, and they cherish our Canadian soldiers. I'm very proud of that as a Canadian, but for us, we fend for ourselves. We don't have any way of helping, so we even raise our own money when people pass on. We've been getting lucky. If it's closer to Winnipeg, the Legions have come out to do a service, to give honour to the military style of burial; but if they're too far away, it's just us and our cultural ways. If they're closer to a city or a Legion, then at least some kind of military burial will take place, but it's not that we have any connection with anybody. We're on our own.

The Chair: Mr. Samson is next.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you for your presentation.

As others have indicated, throughout our trip to visit many of the communities, what we've heard here from the witnesses over the last several months of our study it's been eye-opening. There's no question about it. It's hard to understand how it all transpired and the mistakes that were made.

What would be the barriers in services received from VAC vis-à-vis Métis and other indigenous groups? Is there something that's different today that you know of in the services? Is it pretty well a level playing field today?

Mr. David Chartrand: I still don't think it's a level playing field. I'm not dealing with any science behind me, evidence-wise, on that, but I think without a doubt—and I don't want to use this word too openly—clearly racism was an issue when they returned. They were just not treated the same. Why, I don't know. We'll never know why.

At that time, the bureaucracy in our society was in a different state of mind. As I said, even to the question asked of me earlier today, if you ask a non-indigenous veteran and a Métis veteran and first nations veteran if they're brothers, without hesitation they'll tell you they're brothers, and yet they were not treated equally when they got home. It took how long for first nations to get justice? They did get it. They got their settlement and they have a trust now in place for their veterans.

We promote—I promote, as the president, for sure—without doubt that our people still join the military. We still have to have a strong military to protect our country and we have to be ready no matter what to defend our nation. As for whether they are treated better today, they probably are, but I'm talking now of a generation that's lost so much. There's no catch-up to it. For those from 1946 on, and even going back to1945, you'll ask yourself, "It's 2018. Are they finally going to be treated nicely now when they only have maybe a year left in their lives?" It's not a good place to find yourself.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes. It's shocking when you speak of asking to join the team 30 years after the fact.

Can I conclude that Métis did not get an apology?

Mr. David Chartrand: Never, guaranteed.

Mr. Darrell Samson: First nations did.

Mr. David Chartrand: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Métis did not get a settlement.

Mr. David Chartrand: They did not get anything.

Mr. Darrell Samson: There was no settlement.

Mr. David Chartrand: No. We're the only ones left.

● (1630)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Then today if I speak to a Métis veteran who went to war, and I speak to a first nations person or a white Canadian, the Métis is the only one who didn't get anything.

Mr. David Chartrand: Métis are the only ones left. As I made reference in my comments, even the Japanese and Chinese prisoners of war in Canada got settlements. I believe $25,000 was the amount for them, and $20,000. For the Métis, there was never a settlement or an apology for neglect and the clear discrimination that took place against them. A lot of it wasn't the politicians who did that; it was the bureaucracy that did it.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It's a sad story when you speak about the deputy minister, of course, but—

Mr. David Chartrand: I'm telling you, I was still shocked, my friend. To this day, I cannot believe.... I sat there and I was in shock. I've been around politics for some time. He would not leave his chair until Albina raised her voice.

Mr. Darrell Samson: In the outreach with Veteran Affairs, do you feel that the Métis face some challenges in receiving services, compared with others?

It all depends where you are. How is the outreach system? Are you hearing complaints about not knowing what services are available today or about not receiving services?

Mr. David Chartrand: As I've said, there are very few left alive from World War II. I know some who went to Afghanistan. The son of one of my close friends went. He was lucky. He was supposed to be with the battalion that was, by mistake, killed by Americans. Somebody above decided not to take him then, because they sent him somewhere else, but that was the battalion he was with.

He's had some troubles, and his mom has been trying to figure them out. His mom doesn't blame the department too much, though, because he has psychological problems now. I don't know whether Afghanistan was the final breaking point for him. He works and then he just drops out of the world for some time until he'll call; then he goes back. Then he talks about the nightmares he has.

There is better service now for sure, no doubt.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Are there difficulties in reaching some Métis?

Mr. David Chartrand: Well, they don't even bother coming. They won't come. They are too far up north; they're too far away in various remote communities. Veterans Affairs is not going to come to them. You have to go to them.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Do you have a solution? What areas are there that we don't cover but should?

Mr. David Chartrand: It goes to Mr. MacGregor's question. If you look at it, if you're going to reach the veterans who are still alive and you want to deal with World War II veterans—let's use that as an example—then you have to find out how you get services to them. If they live in Pinehouse, which is way up north in Saskatchewan, how are you going to get to them? They're not going to drive all the way there. They're probably having a hell of a time surviving on their income, but to drive great distances to urban centres.... Most offices exist, or more services exist, in an urban environment; they don't exist in rural areas. You'll know, if you come from a rural area, that there are no services, and most Métis people, especially the seniors and the elders, live in villages. Of our Métis population in Winnipeg, 50% is rural and 50% is urban.

Of the veterans who are still alive today, I don't know of any.... There are just a few Korean War vets.

There is one who is a Korean veteran, and I think our country did assist him. I'm meeting with him when I get back. He's actually going to die of cancer. We're honouring him at an assembly. We're giving him a Métis nation honour and recognizing him in front of our assembly. He will be passing away with the cancer. The doctor gave him four months.

He is a Korean veteran. I've met him several times and have never really heard him complain about service. He must have been getting some services from Veterans Affairs. In general terms, however, most of our people live in rural areas; there's no way for them to access them.

Again, these are people with low education; let's understand that very clearly. Some of these people had grade 5 or 6; they were young boys when they left. They never went back to school. They were trappers. They were people who worked in the bush, and that was their lifestyle.

That's why you came looking for us, actually. You came and asked us in great numbers to join, because we're good hunters; we're good with a gun. You came to ask us to help, and we came, but nobody came back to take care of us after that.

Today I think the challenge you'll face is how to get help to people. First is to get to the level at which they understand what's happening for them. The second piece is to actually have a dialogue and get into the issue of their concerns.

Some of the veterans tell me they couldn't get optical glasses from the Veterans Affairs department, so their son bought them their glasses. It's stuff like that. I didn't do research to check out whether it's true or not, but I'm going to take what they are telling me as true.

● (1635)

The Chair: Mr. Waugh is next.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thank you.

It's good to see you again, Mr. Chartrand.

I live in Saskatoon, south of Batoche. Métis veterans are forgotten among the veterans. I mean, you were forgotten among the forgotten. I've seen it in my province for a century.

Part of the problem—I think Mr. Samson was talking about it—is with veterans in transition from military to civilian life. Most of the first nations, not all, went back to the reserve. You scattered and were forgotten. I'm not defending it, but that was part of the issue, I think, when you look back, when they came back after 1945 from the Second World War.

Maybe your group, the Métis nation, needed to be more vocal. I think now you've done a tremendous job. You've been a leader for them, and maybe now you should be asking for these apologies. We're apologizing every three or four months in the House of Commons for something we've done. Maybe it's your time. Why don't you, on behalf of the Métis nation, demand an apology for those who are still living here today?

Mr. David Chartrand: Let me put it this way. I told you my history. I've been around for a long time. I've asked apologies from two governments, Liberal and Conservative, and I've not received one yet for our veterans.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Keep asking.

Mr. David Chartrand: Trust me, I will. I'll never quit asking. I don't in any way give disrespect to any apology. I think apologies are necessary. All it takes sometimes is just an apology, and people feel that they've been heard. If our country keeps on apologizing for its historical wrongs, I commend them. I don't care what government is in place, whether it's NDP, Conservative or Liberal, if they keep on committing themselves to understand they need to deal with unfinished business. If you look at our land claims, for example, it took us 132 years of waiting and 32 years in the courtrooms. It took us that long to get justice.

It's a challenge. People didn't just scatter. I'd debate anybody, trust me, but they didn't just scatter. They went back to where their families come from. You just heard, as Bob said, how one of them walked 110 miles to join up.

Go to St. Eustache. If you ever come to Manitoba, give me a call and I'll take you to St. Eustache. St. Eustache is a small Métis village. A very large percentage of them went out of Duck Bay, where I come from. Lots of them came out of there, and Camperville. St. Eustache is one I always had great pride in. We put up our monument there. I'll share pictures if you guys want. You'll be quite impressed at how beautiful it is.

One of the things that was impressive when I used to walk into their hall—and they've had this before I was even around, back in the 1950s and 1960s—was that all the pictures of the veterans are on the wall, old pictures of all them, but all of them looking like kids when they returned. They've always honoured these veterans. In our communities it's automatic. When I was growing up, we were raised very strictly by my single mother. If a senior or an elder walked in, especially a veteran, you'd get off your chair immediately and let them sit down, and you'd serve them tea or serve them something immediately. It's just the way we were raised.

For me, as I said, apologies are sometimes, I think, necessary in this country, because for some reason we did such great injustice to the different people and to ourselves. I think we can fix that problem one day, and it will be great. I hope one day this country will apologize. Why are the Métis still not being treated with great respect as veterans? As I said, they went to battle for us with no hesitation, yet our country seems to have a challenge. Why aren't they apologizing? They could be saying, “I'm sorry; we made a big mistake. We're sorry. We thank you very much for what you did for us. We thank you for what you did for our children.”

Before they leave, at least they'd feel like they were honoured. That's what's important, I think.

As I said, there are a handful left. That's why at my assembly I'm announcing on Saturday for those living in Manitoba yet to this day.... And this is not federal money, this is my own money. I do a lot of business contracts. We made quite a bit of money on certain projects. I'm going to give each of the living veterans $20,000, the amount that the first nations got, so they will get honoured before they pass. By the time your study is done, I guarantee you most of them will be gone.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes. Good for you. Don't apologize for making money.

Mr. David Chartrand: I'll never apologize.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: In 2009 you went over to Juno Beach, and two years later, at Batoche with Clem Chartier, you laid a wreath, and let me say that it meant a lot in our community. I was a broadcaster back then, but I do remember that day. Batoche is a very wonderful place. It reeks with history, and it's taken us a long time in our province to appreciate it. I just thank you and Clem for laying the wreath that day.

● (1640)

Mr. David Chartrand: Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: It's a place that is cherished in our province.

Mr. David Chartrand: It should be, because it is a very honourable place. People's lives on both sides were lost. At the end of the day, it shows great honour to all those. As I said in response to the question asked either by Bob or by Darrell, there are no discrepancies between our soldiers today. It's not about bloodline or colour to them. They're brothers and sisters. When they return, they maintain that mentality in their ideology. They're brothers and sisters to their last breath. It's we who seem to find a problem with the difference in ideology of how people should be and how we should treat them.

As I said, if you look at just the evidence I've given you here today—and if you want more facts, I'll give you more facts—I guarantee you it can show that the Métis are the last settled people and veterans in this country, and yet for some reason.... We made progress with Seamus. I made progress with Strahl. I made progress with Albina. I can't remember Albina's last name, and I apologize, but the issue there, at the end of the day, is I came so close each time for this country to do the right thing, and for some reason or another it failed. Either the government changed or something happened.

I hope this time that this country does the right thing for the last few left alive, and I hope the Senate backs it up and demands it be done. If that happens, the Métis nation will be very happy people.

The Chair: We'll end our testimony with questions from Ms. Ludwig.

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Thank you. I'm also sharing my time with Shaun Chen.

I'm very pleased to be on this committee. I'm new to the committee, but I'm not new to veterans. My father was a veteran and my brother was a veteran, so I thank you for the work you're doing and I congratulate you for being elected over the last 15 years. That's a long time.

My line of questioning is a little bit different. I'm wondering what the opportunity has been to capture the stories and the history of all the people who have served who have not been recognized, but also to capture the narrative on that. You do a wonderful, amazing job, Mr. Chartrand, of sharing it, but I'm wondering if we could see that in books, as part of history.

Mr. David Chartrand: It should be something that you recommend. Even with our young generation in the Métis nation, we keep on educating and showing them immediately part of our cultural ways, and we honour the veterans at every assembly we have. It's just essential. It's part of our cultural ways, and we try to teach them to our young people because today sometimes we forget and we look at them as old people. We try to tell our young generations. They don't realize that these were just boys themselves when they left. Now they are old, yes, and they are struggling and trying to survive. The young generation, in all walks of life, sometimes forgets to show honour and respect, and to stop and say thank you. I think that's something we need to look at more closely. We can do that with books. We can do that with teaching at the school.

Let's be honest with ourselves. National Veterans Day in Canada is used as a damn holiday for some reason. It's not honouring any veterans. People are going shopping and just taking it as time off. They used to close stores at 12:00; now big stores are open all day. There used to be time when things were shut down. You could only get milk and bread and stuff from a store because it was a time to show honour and respect to the veterans of this country and to those who gave their lives for our freedom.

Our system has changed and again they are being forgotten. Even on the actual holiday we have in this country, they're not being given that honour, so maybe we need to really begin educating our young generation about the importance, because a war will come, but it will be a different kind of war. It'll be a pushing of buttons. It's going to be a different war, but there will still be a lot of people who will die.

People need to know that we have to show great respect to all those who still.... When people join.... You know better than I, clearly, that when your father joined or your brother joined, you realized immediately that they were joining on the premise of knowing that they might be killed. They were joining something knowing that they might never come back.

Today people get comfortable, as though we know there's not going to be a big war, but there might be. You might be going to Afghanistan. You might not be coming home or you might be psychologically defeated.

Therefore I think we should start writing books. I think we should go back and change the way we think in this country. Why is our national day for recognizing our country's veterans not being treated as it should be? We have the Legions doing prayers—I attend lots of them throughout different parts of my province—and that's it. It's over. Everybody goes home, has their little cake and sandwich, and they are gone. Nobody reminds themselves that if it weren't for those people, we could be under the power of Germany today.

Don't fool yourselves. It could have happened. What are we doing as governments? We're not going the extra mile to stop it and to psychologically change our young generation. As I said about that person and his wife and his two kids praying at that graveyard and not knowing who they're praying for, they did it because their father did it. Their father took them when they were young and they still do it, and they're teaching their kids to do it.

If we could have that in our soul a little bit, that kind of honour in this country, maybe we'd show a different respect and care to our veterans, even those who have passed on. We can't forget that day or that event. We should promote changing the very mindset of our country and truly showing respect to the veterans.

● (1645)

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Thank you.

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chartrand and Mr. Benoit, for your testimony today.

You've clearly articulated the incredible sacrifices made by the Métis, their patriotism for Canada and their belief, as you said, that the new Canada they fought for would be there for them when they returned. History, sadly, has proven otherwise, and for that we as Canadians should all be very ashamed.

You said that the Métis are the only ones left without an apology and without a settlement, but as we also heard, we need to make the necessary supports and services available to Métis veterans who continue to suffer today.

I would like to ask how government can help to make those amends, help those veterans begin a new chapter, provide them with the supports they need, right the wrongs that were made. How can we support them through the government?

Mr. David Chartrand: The best way to analyze the success of a recommendation and to see your recommendations followed through and met.... That is why we are pushing distinct issues among ourselves, first nations, and Inuit. There's a very clear reason we pushed that as indigenous governments. We can analyze and measure the success or investment of any of those three identities I just shared with you.

I can give you the names of the 5,000 veterans over there. I can establish, in partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs, how many of them were World War II veterans out of the 5,000. That could easily be done. Then you could measure what's happening to those who are still living today, and see if there are any services and if they face challenges.

Since there's a handful, it should be quite simple to establish where they are and understand what has happened to them. Then maybe we could learn a lesson so that it will never happen to the new veterans who are coming out of the different wars that are taking place in the eastern part of the world.

In retrospect, we need to do measurables. That's why we fought vigorously on this distinct-based issue, because when most Canadians heard that indigenous veterans got a settlement, they thought we got something. They think our veterans got treated that way. They think our veterans got their due in this country. They didn't, but the word “indigenous” implies that all of us got it. We didn't. The Métis nation has never received the proper promise that was given to them, so if we want to do it, let's do it right and let's measure it right. It's easy to measure if somebody takes the energy to do it. If you have a distinct base, you could measure it just like that, very quickly, but you have to make the department do that.

The Chair: Thank you.

That ends our time for our testimony today. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank both of you for coming here today. If there's any information you want to get back to us, if you send it to the clerk, the clerk would get it to all the committee.

May I have a motion to adjourn?

Mr. Bratina—

Mr. David Chartrand: Before you adjourn, Mr. Chair, it's customary for my people to give gifts when we go to different meetings. I brought a gift for each of the parties because I respect the way this party is set up. You have yourself as the chair and you have an NDP member and a Conservative who are co-chairs. I brought each of you a gift. I didn't bring everyone a gift because I didn't know how big the panel was going to be that I was speaking to here.

I would like to leave that behind. I hope you wear it with great pride. It is a beaded poppy of the Métis artwork. I hope you wear it on Veterans Day and whenever you're doing a hearing on veterans across Canada. I tell you that when indigenous veterans see that, especially Métis, you will be treated with the utmost respect.

Again, I want to thank each of you for your questions. I hope I was able to clarify. If you have any questions, you can get hold of me anytime you want. My government is always willing, and the Métis nation is willing at any time, to give you more information. If you need some clarity on any small issue, just give us a call, and we will do our darndest to clarify it for you.

Thank you very much for allowing us to speak here today.

● (1650)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. David Chartrand: Oh, I also brought this. You will see that the back is Juno Beach, but what I wanted to say to you is apparently I wasn't allowed to give it to everybody because it's not translated into French, so I will leave it here if you want.

The Chair: I think it has been circulated.

Mr. David Chartrand: Excellent. They told me I wasn't allowed to give it away because it's not translated into French. If you want to look at it, these are some of the proud veterans. Most of them have passed on. I recognize most of them. I hope you look at this with a smile on your face when you see the smiles on their faces.

The Chair: Thank you. Are you in here?

Mr. David Chartrand: I'm right there—the big guy in white in the front.

The Chair: Okay, I have to put my glasses on.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.