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Chair

Mr. Neil Ellis

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• (0850)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.)): I'd like to call the meeting to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), we have election of the first vice-chair. With permission of the committee, we're going to delay that to after 10 o'clock, and start with the witnesses.

We have a two-hour panel. We'll go to a double round. We'll start with two 10-minute statements, followed by the Q and A.

I would like to welcome Frédéric Charlet, project director to the executive director of the Office national des anciens combattants et victimes de guerre; and Alexandre Coyo, project manager of the General Secretariat for Administration.

Good morning, gentlemen.

We will start with Frédéric for 10 minutes.

Mr. Frédéric Charlet (Project Director to the Executive Director, Office national des anciens combattants et victimes de guerre, ministère des Armées): Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen of the committee, good morning.

My name is Frédéric Charlet, controller general of the armed forces. I am the assistant to the executive director of the Office national des anciens combattants et victimes de guerre. She could not be here this afternoon because she is with young students at Notre-Dame de Lorette, one of our largest war cemeteries, located not far from here.

So the director is at Notre-Dame de Lorette today, a site you are familiar with, because it is close to Vimy. I also believe that some of you accompanied the Prime Minister for the commemoration activities last summer.

Before we get to the substance of the issue, I would like to say a few words about the Office national des anciens combattants et victimes de guerre, or ONACVG.

It will help to know that this is a public institution that today is part of the Ministère des Armées. It now falls under the Ministère des Armées. It is actually the result of the merger of three offices. The first, the Office national des mutilés et réformés, was established in 1916, during the Great War. ONACVG is also a descendant of the Office national des pupilles de la nation. This was also established

during the Great War, in 1917. To this very day, France has this very special ability to care for the children of those killed or wounded in military operations, by the country adopting them. We can come back to that later, if you wish. The third and final office that was absorbed into the Office national des anciens combattants et victimes de guerre is the Office national du combattant, established in 1926, whose mission was transferred to ONACVG in 1945.

I feel that it is important to point out that ONACVG today cares for about 2.6 million people that we call "ressortissants". Keep that figure in mind. Of course, among the 2.6 million, there are no longer any veterans from the First World War, "poilus", as we call them in France. However, we still have tens of thousands of veterans from the Second World War and many veterans from the Indochina War. Today, those who swell the ranks of our veterans, if I may put it that way, are the professionals and the conscripts whom France sent to fight in Algeria between 1954 and 1962.

Finally, and not for long, we have been welcoming and caring for what we call in France the fourth combat generation, by which we mean all those who, since 1962, have served in external operations in Africa and the Near East, as well as those who are still in theatre on external operations today.

Since 1993, our office has issued more than 150,000 veteran's cards to those who have fought in external operations. Today, that is one of the major focuses of our office's work. I feel that is important to talk about the numbers of people, both veterans and war victims, that our office cares for, as well as describing their diversity.

The second factor to consider is the parity of representation in the management of our office. Certainly, it operates with public funds, but it has a board of directors on which veterans' associations are represented. They quite literally have the most votes. That is why the office is managed in a way we refer to as parity-based.

There is a third and final factor that I feel is important. I also feel that it is a problem Canada can perhaps relate to. Today, our office still has quite a dense network, since we provide services in every region of our country, and also in North Africa. We have about 105 neighbourhood service outlets that can receive veterans and their families at the same time, and respond in person to the concerns of veterans of all combat generations, in particular those who have served in external operations.

I have more or less gone over the points I wanted to bring up by way of introduction. I will step aside for Commissioner Alexandre Coyo, who will be able to flesh out my remarks and deal with other subjects.

● (0855)

Mr. Alexandre Coyo (Project Manager, General Secretariat for Administration, Ministère des Armées): Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen of the committee, I am Chief Commissioner Alexandre Coyo. I work with the General Secretariat for Administration on matters involving the combat community. The combat community naturally include veterans, but also wounded soldiers, families who have lost loved ones, and the victims of acts of terrorism.

I am going to talk to you very quickly about the pillars of the ministry's policy on the care of members of the military who become sick or injured while serving. The policy is clearly horizontal in that it involves serving members and those who have left the service and will enter the ambit of the Office national des anciens combattants et victimes de guerre for long-term care.

The first of the three pillars of the ministry's policy of care is the right to reparation. In France, we have a right to specific, financial reparation. If you wish, I can tell you a little more about the financial care we provide.

The second pillar we offer to wounded soldiers and their families is personal support. This is an extremely human dimension of the policy, in which the only mission of those who operate it is to provide personal support to wounded soldiers. Each of the armed forces has a wounded warriors' group to provide that support. Once the member has left active service, ONACVG takes over.

There are also groups like the Service de santé des armées, that provide a range of services to each member.

The third pillar, which is seen as essential, is what we describe as protection. This includes recognition mechanisms, including awarding medals in order to put a value on combat actions, or the statutory protections established in the Code de la défense. They provide specific protections for the rights of military members and their families.

If I may, I would like to give you some key figures.

In France today, we provide pensions for 150,000 veterans. That is the overall total at the end of 2016. An additional 55,000 spouses or children of wounded soldiers also receive support after the soldier dies. The policy means that we spend 1.2 billion euros annually in specific support for wounded soldiers.

I would be delighted to answer your questions.

● (0900)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll start with our first round.

Ms. Wagantall, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you so much for being here with us this morning. We really appreciate the opportunity to hear how our allies are handling their veterans.

I have a question with regard to the movement from active duty to becoming a veteran, that whole transition process. We're working to make it better. I'm wondering what kind of a time lag exists, or whether there is any experience of a chasm for your veterans between having served and then moving into that new life of transition into civilian life.

Either one of you can answer that however you like.

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: If I understand correctly, you are wondering how one becomes a veteran in France.

Is that what you meant by your question?

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: That's correct.

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: If you have been deployed on external operations for more than 120 days, you can ask the Office national des anciens combattants et victimes de guerre for what we call a veteran's card. Having the card gives you the right to wear the Croix du Combattant. As soon as you have that card, you are considered a combatant, or a veteran, and you become the responsibility of the Office national des anciens combattants et victimes de guerre. You are then eligible for social benefits that go hand in hand with professional rehabilitation. The statute does not assume that you are wounded. If you were wounded in an operation, you can also ask for a military disability pension. Those pensions are administered by Commissioner Coyo's services.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: If I understand correctly, you could be receiving those benefits while still serving.

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: Yes, you can.

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: Absolutely.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: That's a very different approach from what we have, I believe.

Could you describe a little more what that veteran's card looks like and exactly what benefits it gives them?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: I can show you mine.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Is it connected with services? If they need health benefits, like prescriptions and that type of thing, would they use that card? Or is this an identity card?

● (0905)

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: At the moment, the card does not come with a chip. The Office becomes responsible for the bearer, who, as a result, can get administrative, social and financial support. Having this card also allows the bearer to wear what we call the Croix du Combattant. That is an additional medal that these young veterans can wear.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Remind me how many days they need to have served to qualify for the card.

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: You have to have spent 120 days on external operations, but I must make it clear that the concept of external operation has a legal basis. The Ministère des Armées determines whether the operation a person has taken part in is actually an external operation. In France, we have sovereignty forces stationed outside the country. Those stationed outside the country as part of those forces are not considered to be in an external operation.

So the concept of external operation has a legal basis. The decision to declare an external operation falls to the ministry. If that declaration is made, the 120-day clock starts ticking and participation is cumulative. I am sure you know that France's armed forces intervene in a number of operations. As I said earlier, operations occur in Africa, in the Middle East, and in other places around the world. A person may very well be deployed for 50 days in Africa, the Central African Republic or Mali or Chad, and 70 days in Lebanon, Iraq or elsewhere. As soon as the person has accumulated 120 days, they can ask for their veteran's card.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: As far as reservists are concerned, do you have the same kind of scenario as we have where you have reservists available to come up and serve, and do they get the same kind of...?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: Yes, they do. Reservists can take part in an operation. They can also ask for the card as soon as they have chalked up 120 days in external operations.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fraser.

[Translation]

Mr. Colin Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to our witnesses for their presentations and for joining us today. It will help us to try to improve the situation for our veterans as much as we can, by comparing their situation with veterans in France. I also want to thank France for the welcome we were given as Canadians when we went there on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the battle of Vimy Ridge. You mentioned that our Prime Minister was there in Notre-Dame de Lorette. I myself was fortunate enough to be part of the Canadian delegation that travelled to France in April. The welcome we received, particularly from young people, was very moving. We thank you for that.

When I was young, I was a tour guide at Vimy. It was good to go back. It is important to pay tribute to our veterans. In Canada, we are seeing a growing interest in activities to commemorate our military history and to honour our veterans.

Is the same thing happening in France?

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: Yes, there is certainly a definite appetite for history in general and for last century's conflicts. It is true that the ceremonies and rallies that marked the commemoration of the centenary of the Great War have led to more discussion of veterans. Each combat generation also has its own history. A lot of work has been done on the First World War. There is also a lot of work on the period between 1939 and 1945. For France, it is a lot more complicated to work on periods like the war in Algeria. You know that it was a painful period for us, and it is true that talking about a time in history where France sent more than 1 million of its children into combat remains a little painful even today, but work is beginning. Some historians are working on it. The war in Algeria is being commemorated. For example, this painful chapter can be remembered on three dates during the year.

Yesterday, for example, September 25, was the Journée nationale d'hommage aux harkis. You may know that the harkis were French Muslims who, during the war in Algeria, fought on the side of the French. The same French who, in 1962, did not embrace them as they should have.

We are continuing to work on the period of the war in Algeria. We have also begun to work on reviving the memory of the external operations. I know that it is somewhat the same in Canada. Some operations are talked about more easily, or less easily, than others, like the one in Rwanda, for example, which should bring back memories here. This page in our history of external operations is still very difficult to recall dispassionately even today.

● (0910)

Mr. Colin Fraser: Is there a particular involvement with young people to teach them about history as well as about respecting veterans? Is your office involved in that regard?

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: Certainly.

Today, in fact, you get me and not my executive director. That is because she is accompanying high school classes to the war cemetery at Notre-Dame de Lorette, to explain its significance to the students. In France, our office maintains 274 of them today. It is something we address with young people a great deal.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Thank you.

I would like to go back to the topic of military pensions. We know that the system of military disability pensions is quite complex in Canada, but I am sure that the same goes for France.

How many of your veterans have the military disability pension as their sole source of income?

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: It can happen, but it is not likely to be the most common situation. Often, a retirement pension comes on top of a disability pension. The two are cumulative. Perhaps we could imagine the situation you are describing if a soldier had a very short period of activity and was therefore not eligible for a retirement pension.

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: Let me add some specifics to what Commissioner Coyo has just said.

We were talking earlier about the veteran's card. As soon as anyone carrying that card reaches 65, they become eligible for what we call a veteran's retirement allowance. Today, that allowance is 750 euros a year.

Mr. Colin Fraser: That is not a lot.

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: It is not a huge amount, I agree. You cannot live on 750 euros a year, but it is still something additional that you are eligible for only after 65.

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: I would like to add something if I may.

We have a kind of group benefits system. It is an additional retirement system, if you like, which enables veterans to make contributions during their careers and accumulate a nest egg when the careers end. There are also many tax provisions that allow veterans to lighten their tax burdens.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Thank you. I understand.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and my thanks to you all for being here.

There are clearly two different realities, for French veterans and Canadian veterans, so forgive me if I ask questions that may not necessarily be pertinent. I understand that your veterans can pay into a pension fund and that they collect that when they leave the services, when they're no longer in the forces. So they may go out and work or find other ways to supplement their income. Then at age 65, the additional pension of 750 euros kicks in.

In the case of veterans who leave the service, we've noted that it sometimes takes a very long time for a serious injury to manifest itself, whether it be a physical injury, an emotional injury, or a mental health injury.

To qualify for benefits, do veterans need proof to determine whether or not an injury is service-related? Do your veterans have to demonstrate that an injury occurred during their time of service to the country, or does the burden of proof fall on the government or the military?

• (0915)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: If I understand you correctly, you want to know whether the burden of proof falls to the administration or to the injured soldier.

Today, it is up to soldiers to prove that their injury is service-related, except if the injury happened during an external operation. In that case, the burden of proof is reversed and falls to the administration.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

If there is a dispute, do you have a system of appeals in regard to those benefits, and if so, how does it work?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: Yes, absolutely. We have a recourse system, which is primarily non-adversarial and lets soldiers try to prove that their injuries really are service-related. Thereafter, if there is a dispute or a disagreement, they can go to the military pensions tribunals.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

I want to get back to the mental health supports. We're very able to identify physical injuries, but sometimes emotional injuries are not so apparent. What kind of mental health support services are available for veterans, and do those services include the veterans' families? If a veteran is suffering, his or her family is most certainly suffering too. Are services available and do they extend to family members?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: In France, we have what we call *Écoute défense*. This is a telephone help system that operates around the clock and that can respond to wounded soldiers in possible distress. The line is also open to families.

What I am describing is an emergency line that can help someone at critical moments. But there is also long-term support. That is run by the *Service de santé des armées*. The service provides psychiatrists and psychologists whose responsibility is to provide long-term support to soldiers and families.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Would those armed forces health services be available to veterans after they're out of the armed forces? I'm wondering, because here there's rather a divide. When you're in service, the military doctors look after you and your family; when you're outside, it becomes civilian doctors. Do you have that same situation?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: Yes. If they participated in the ONACVG operations, the veterans who left the service may, in cases of difficulty or distress, use the office's outreach services. The office has an agreement with the *Service de santé des armées*. In cases of medical or psychological distress, veterans can consult a doctor or psychologist from the *Service de santé des armées*. Even once they have left the service, they can continue to take advantage of some medical, even psychological, assistance through the ONACVG.

• (0920)

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

It sounds as though you have good collaboration between the two systems.

That's one of the problems we've encountered here. Very often once veterans have been discharged or transitioned out, they can't find the kinds of supports outside in the civilian medical system that were available to them on the inside.

The Chair: Sorry, we're out of time now. We'll have to come back to that.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: *Merci beaucoup.*

The Chair: Mr. Bratina.

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thank you.

I have some questions about PTSD—I think in French it's *trouble de stress post-traumatique*—and also homelessness among veterans, *sans-abri*.

In the first case, we heard about the Algerian war. I have very vivid memories of the war in Indochina, the fall at Dien Bien Phu. We found in Canada that there was PTSD in large measure after Afghanistan. The Americans suggest that they still have a large cohort of suicide victims from Vietnam.

Was there identification of PTSD following the fall in Indochina or Algeria? What is your experience with PTSD?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: You are referring to the Indochina War period. To this day, the Office issues Viet Minh prisoner cards. You also mentioned Dien Bien Phu, where thousands of French soldiers were taken prisoner in 1954. Many of them were interned in Viet Minh camps. You may be aware of the detention conditions in those camps. A number of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) cases were reported soon afterwards, and some are still being reported today. People still go to the Office to request a former Viet Minh prisoner card for PTSD, and possession of the card comes with a selection of rights.

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: If I may, I would like to add something.

Yes, some injured soldiers may not have reported a psychological trauma initially. They report the physical injury, but not a psychological injury. The military disability pension system allows them to claim a worsening of their injury five or 10 years later in order to report a psychological injury.

In that process, the veterans associations have a fundamental role to play because they know how to identify individuals in distress. We try to collaborate and forge ties with those associations.

[English]

Mr. Bob Bratina: That leads to another problem we have—so I'm interested in the French experience—which is homelessness, in veterans who have chosen to basically hide from the world. They're very difficult to find, because they're trained to be deceptive and to hide themselves. What is the case in France? Is there a similar group who have chosen not to engage with the system but to basically disappear?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: In France, nothing compares to what the U.S. and Canada have experienced with respect to the homeless. The regional network I mentioned earlier helps individuals in distress to find a local support service.

Let me add one thing. It is important to realize that those regional services, those local services, work closely with other government services, particularly the prefects. I'm not sure whether the Canadian

system is similar to the French system, but the ONACVG works extensively with the prefects, who have specific responsibility in the area of housing. In France, prefects have quotas for housing that they can assign. Since we work well with the prefects, we may very well turn to them to try to find housing when a veteran is homeless and in distress.

● (0925)

[English]

Mr. Bob Bratina: Thank you.

On the question of esprit de corps, do the French veterans still see their comrades in any sort of formal way? How does that work in the French experience?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: It is difficult to answer the question.

Earlier, we mentioned the associations. I'm not sure whether I'm answering your question properly, but historically, veterans have been able to organize themselves into powerful associations, which are still powerful today. In my opening remarks, I said that, at the Office, the associations have the majority of votes. Those associations are the ones that define or, at least participate in defining, the policy of the Office in terms of the support to veterans.

This esprit de corps is reflected in the way the associations are organized. In terms of the external operations generation, things are a little different. The World War I veterans managed to form some extremely powerful associations. Those in World War II also managed to make themselves heard, just like those from Algeria. The result is some really powerful associations that have some significant clout in the political world. It's a little more complicated for the new generation in external operations. Perhaps the esprit de corps is in fact less of a factor.

I'm not sure whether I answered your question properly.

[English]

Mr. Bob Bratina: That was a very good answer. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Ms. Lambropoulos.

[Translation]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Good morning, everyone.

Thank you for being here today.

We are aware of the mission of Défense Mobilité, which supports veterans during their transition and return to civilian life.

First, could you tell me what types of programs Défense Mobilité offers?

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: Thank you.

Défense Mobilité is an agency of the human resources directorate of the Ministère des Armées. This agency is responsible for the transition of all the military personnel, not just veterans and injured soldiers. In recent years, support workers at Défense Mobilité had to be trained specifically to support injured soldiers, particularly those with psychological traumas who need special support. Like the Office, we have a regional network that is quite dense even though it is not as large as that of the Office. In all the military installations, we see instances of Défense Mobilité and responsible support staff, to a greater or lesser extent.

The programs are very diverse because the support for an injured individual is customized. Not all the injured have the same wishes and objectives, which means that it is really important to be able to adapt to their expectations.

The support is individualized and for the long term. Once soldiers leave the service, if they still experience transition problems or have trouble finding a job, they will be able to knock on the door of the ONACVG, which will also be able to provide them with support to help them with their transition.

• (0930)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Okay.

How does the Défense Mobilité organization reach out to veterans who might be able to take part in those programs? I imagine that some of them try to contact you. Do they have to initiate it themselves?

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: Earlier, I quickly mentioned the assistance groups that actually work directly with all the injured service members. They knock on the door of this single agency; there is one per service. Members relate best to their own service, whether it's the army, navy or air force. The agency takes care of the injured members. As I said, it is a multidisciplinary, customized path.

Let me tell you about something that works well.

Every two months, we hold meetings with all the workers in the support process and we review the cases of the each injured member one after the other. Around the table there are doctors, psychiatrists, the social worker for social support, and people from the support groups for the injured, from ONACVG and Défense Mobilité. We review 30 to 40 cases and try to determine the level of maturity of each injured person, with their expectations, and to move each case forward in a very specific way.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Okay.

Finally, how many injured veterans use your services after they are discharged, after they return to civilian life?

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: Once the soldiers have left the active life, they no longer contact the Ministère des Armées; they go to the ONACVG. I cannot say whether many transition requests are sent to the Office.

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: We have set up a continuum to an extent, which keeps track of what Commissioner Coyo does and what we do at the Office. It is certainly important. We communicate to ensure that the veterans are constantly supported over time.

In terms of the transition for the injured, the Office is currently tracking 400 cases. It is not a huge number. Afterwards, depending

on the person's experience, expectations and profile, we can propose some adapted training. To that end, we have a contract with an employment agency, the Agence nationale pour la formation professionnelle des adultes, which is a parapublic organization. We signed a contract with this external service provider in order to have tailored services. This segment of the population is so specific that tailor-made services are a must.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McColeman.

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

I want to pick up on Mr. Bratina's comments. There are specific issues for our veterans that are very troublesome, and they're very much at the forefront of veterans' issues these days. Both issues were mentioned by him, namely PTSD and homelessness.

If you had an issue in France that was the most troublesome for the veterans, what would it be?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: Perhaps the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is our biggest concern. The mission to Afghanistan in particular has resulted in a number of psychological injuries. It is both an old and recent issue. We know full well that PTSD already existed in 1914-1918, even if it was recognized only very recently, at least in France. So it's an old issue that is also new.

We see full well that missions in external operations are increasingly difficult. It started in Afghanistan, but we have since intervened in Mali, as you know. Today, we are conducting Operation Barkhane and we also have troops in Iraq. We see that the intensity of interventions is increasing and that the number of injured, especially psychologically injured, is also increasing.

• (0935)

[English]

Mr. Phil McColeman: Thank you. I want to move on to another subject.

About 15 years ago we developed what's called the new Veterans Charter, and that was at the request of the veterans to move toward a more modernized system of remuneration for disability and for regular pension.

Could you give this committee an example of what a fully pensioned veteran would receive as a military pension? I'm not sure of the length of service that is required for that. Perhaps it's 20 or 25 years of full service as a regular soldier, not one who has moved up the ranks, because I know that will affect it.

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: It is a very difficult subject. In addition, it varies a great deal. This is no longer just about veterans in the French sense of the word. You are talking about soldiers in uniform who did not necessarily participate in operations. It is like any retiree from a public agency.

[English]

Mr. Phil McColeman: I'm going to run out of time, so I'm going to interrupt you if you don't mind. Obviously, it's difficult for you to give us a number, but could you give us a range of numbers, between the pension of someone who was in battle and, say, a higher rank? Do you have any averages of military pensions and what they would be?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: It is very difficult to give you one straight answer, because it can vary a lot depending on the soldiers' experiences. I don't have those numbers in my head. However, the human resources branch of the ministry publishes every year what is called the social record. This makes it possible to keep track of certain data. Perhaps the one you mentioned is in the social record. If you wish, we can forward the data to you.

[English]

Mr. Phil McColeman: Thank you. I'd appreciate getting those numbers when you have them. I think the committee would likely be trying to make a comparison in terms of euros to dollars, and what our packages are.

Another thing that was requested in the new Veterans Charter was lump-sum payments for disabilities. From the very few notes I've read—I'm new to this committee—I don't think France has a lump-sum payment program that a veteran could opt into for a particular disability. For example, the veteran would receive a lump-sum payment for the loss of a limb. Different types of disabilities would qualify for different types of lump-sum payments. Do you have anything like that in the French system?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: Yes, we use what we call a scale guide. This allows us to determine the level of disability according to the injury. The degree of disability in turn determines what the individuals are entitled to. If the person is completely disabled, they will receive quite a considerable pension. However, if they are slightly injured, they will be entitled to a somewhat lower pension. It really depends on the seriousness of the injury. The military doctors determine how serious the injury is.

[English]

Mr. Phil McColeman: Could we get that chart that shows what the lump-sum payment is? Could we have a copy of that chart so we can compare it to ours? Would you be able to send that to us?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: We can certainly check and give you the figures.

[English]

Mr. Phil McColeman: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Samson.

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you very much for your presentation; it is much appreciated. You provided us with an overview of the situation in your country so

that we can continue to provide and improve services to our veterans.

I will try to ask you more specific questions, given how little time I have.

Could you describe the types of programs provided to the wards of the nation, meaning the support you provide to young people whose parents experienced difficult situations?

• (0940)

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: When the parent of a young person is killed in combat or injured to the extent that they are no longer able to provide for the child, an adoption process as a ward of the nation may be undertaken. This takes place before the high court. The case is handled by the Office national des anciens combattants et victimes de guerre, and the judge in the court decides, in the name of the nation, whether to adopt the child or not. It is important to note that this does not relieve the injured parents, or those who might remain afterwards, of the parental authority over the child. It is important to clarify that, because sometimes people are reluctant to start the process, because they think their child is going to be taken away.

Once these children become wards of the nation, it applies for life, meaning that they had to be adopted before the age of 18, but they can then be supported until the age of 21 in most cases, and even later. This usually means that the Office funds the education. If the parents have financial difficulties, the Office can provide funding to address difficult financial situations with its social action budget.

Every year, we provide the wards with approximately 3 million euros.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

Do you have hospitals for veterans only?

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: These days, we do not have hospitals exclusively for veterans. They are almost all open to civilians, but there are hospitals that give priority to veterans. During an evacuation from a theatre of operations, a hospital in Percy is responsible for receiving most of the injured soldiers. It gives priority to all military personnel, but if civilians had to be treated tomorrow, they could have access.

Mr. Darrell Samson: So if a veteran is in crisis at around 2 a.m., they have to go to a hospital open to the entire community?

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: That really depends on where the veteran is. If they are in the Paris area, they can easily go to a military hospital. There are not many military hospitals these days. If I remember correctly, there may be 10 or so, eight or nine, I think. They are basically in the large French cities. However, veterans can have access to a Centre médical des Armées, meaning that every military unit has a medical centre nearby with a few doctors, and veterans can knock on that door.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I have another question.

For instance, if a veteran is discharged from the medical centre and realizes, 10 years later, that they have post-traumatic stress disorder or another disorder, and has needs as a result of their involvement in combat, is there a process to ensure that their case can be reopened easily?

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: It is an administrative issue. It is never easy when it comes to transparency. A file has to be prepared and additional steps must be taken, such as going to a doctor who can assess everything.

Is it very simple? We can agree that, from the injured person's perspective, it is never simple enough. However, the system is there.

Earlier, I talked about the key players in providing support. At this stage in the process, the associations could collect some information that the government will not be able to.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It's a complicated topic.

Questions often come up here about veterans who haven't been injured in combat. Often, five, 10 or 15 years later, they find themselves in a delicate situation. It's a complicated topic.

What percentage of veterans come back? Has this percentage increased? If so, in which cases?

• (0945)

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: There have certainly been more since Afghanistan.

Earlier, I spoke about the veteran's card, which is issued by the office. The challenge we must face is encouraging young soldiers who have taken part in external operations and who are now leaving the service to request the veteran's card. They can apply for one as they leave the service or a little before. That way, if the injury appears 15 or 20 years later, the veteran can take advantage of support from the outset, because the veteran already has a veteran's card. The office's outreach services are then mobilized.

When someone leaves the institution and doesn't have any psychological or other problems, the veteran's card acts as a sort of safety net. If the injury is triggered one day, the person can go to the office and get emergency first aid or initial support because the individual is already registered with the ONACVG.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Do people automatically receive the card when they leave the service?

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: They need to apply, and we encourage them to. Some communications campaigns, targeting young soldiers, are meant to encourage veterans to apply for the card as soon as they leave the service.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Wagantall, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you.

I really appreciate what we're learning today.

I have a few questions around the term "terrorism" and how that has changed the way our armed forces are having to fight and the circumstances they are facing. What has been happening in France on your soil with regard to terrorism certainly resonates.

How do the armed forces interact in those circumstances? Where is the breakdown between them and your police force and first responders?

Obviously, these circumstances bring about very horrific circumstances and much apprehension, and I'm wondering if that is changing in any way the way you're going to have to deal with soldiers who are involved in those kinds of circumstances, as far as recognizing their service goes. Is that something that's happening or not?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: It's a bit complicated for us to talk about it because we're thinking about it.

I will try to present things simply.

As you certainly know, we are fighting terrorism, both abroad, in the context of what we call external operations, and domestically. I will come back to the topic of the veteran's card. Soldiers who are sent on an external operation can take advantage of the veteran's card. They are covered, in that respect. However, when soldiers patrol now in the streets of Paris or domestically, it isn't recognized as an external operation. So they can't request a veteran's card. Symbolically, it would be a little much to say that soldiers who intervene in France, domestically, are taking part in an external operation.

So it's a bit complicated for us to answer the question because we are currently thinking about it. This is an issue that will require follow-up.

I would like to talk about the victims of terrorist acts, although this isn't the subject of your study in committee. In France, victims of acts of terrorism, or victims in the broad sense of the term, such as civilians who are wounded in an attack, are considered victims of war. The Ministère des Armées and the office support them as victims of war. In this case, we no longer speak of veterans.

• (0950)

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Right. I guess what I was trying to get at is that we are facing different circumstances, as are you, in which we're having to look at and consider what this means within our armed forces and in our service. If you have a victim who's considered a war victim on your own soil, it just complicates things, I guess. I appreciate that.

With regard to the board members, you mentioned that they are appointed for four-year terms in the various categories. There are those representing Second World War veterans, those from the post-1964 period, and this type of thing. You indicate that they're appointed. Do they as a group, as a cohort, have any influence on who is appointed on their behalf? How is that done?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: We are talking about the board of directors of the office. Its members are appointed by the minister who is responsible for matters relating to veterans. Very often, in fact, it is the associations that propose names. Often, they are the national presidents of these associations. Then it is the minister who, by ministerial order, appoints them to sit on the board of directors.

There are actually representatives, although few in number, of the generation of the soldiers of 1939-1945, the veterans of the wars of Indochina and Algeria especially and, nowadays, veterans from external operations. Representatives also include war widows, wards of the nation and victims of terrorist acts. There is diversity and a fairly impressive richness.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Right, so within that board, at the moment, your president has not appointed anyone to that position. Is there someone in the role of minister responsible for veterans?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: If I've understood correctly, you're asking whether a minister is responsible for veterans and this specific issue.

Right now, we have a minister of the armed forces, and at her side is a secretary of state, who is a little lower in rank than the minister and who is responsible for veterans' issues.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathysen, you have three minutes.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you very much.

I want to go back to the question Mr. McColeman asked in regard to lump-sum payments. If a veteran receives a lump-sum payment, is that veteran disqualified from the traditional type of pension? That's the situation we have here. Veterans who have received a lump-sum payment have opted for just that money, and there's a dispute now about the fairness of that, because the lump sum is far less than a traditional pension.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: The answer is that, ultimately, the person isn't compensated for the injury at one time. The injured member will receive a monthly pension that will be linked to the level of disability. This person will have a military disability pension for life. If the injury worsens during the injured person's life, he or she may request a review of his or her record to obtain a higher disability rate.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: In effect, you do have that traditional type of pension. It's just that it depends on the degree of injury or the ability of the individual to get on with life outside the military.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: Yes, absolutely. It really depends on how serious the injury is.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

[English]

I'm wondering about the training. You said that you have contracted an outside agency to provide training and support for job transition. Are there rules about who gets that training? For example, here, a certain amount of money is awarded to someone leaving the military to pursue higher education or training opportunities. Do you have that same kind of situation, in which

there is a variation in how much support is available for re-education or training?

• (0955)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: The answer is extremely variable depending on the injuries. Ultimately, we don't have a payment scale based on a category. Some injured individuals will require a much longer support period, while others will return immediately. So there aren't pre-set amounts.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: So it's simply what the individual needs, without any encumbrances.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: Yes, absolutely. We try to provide personalized support. After that, training may cost more depending on the needs of the individual. So, of course, all of this is managed. We can't imagine offering all the training, but we try to respond to a variety of needs.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

Are veterans generally happy with that level—

The Chair: Sorry, we've maxed out on this one. Thank you.

Ms. Wagantall, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you again.

Disability pension systems, for us and obviously for you as indicated here, are complex. When your members receive that disability pension—they've qualified for it, it's all set in place—what are the parameters or conditions under which that pension can be impacted by other social benefits, or any other employment income they may receive?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: Indeed, injured soldiers don't have just the military disability pension, they will have other associated rights, which includes health care coverage that will take into account medical care and equipment. We will even fund up to 100% for next generation prostheses for individuals, for soldiers who want to reintegrate into the professional world. These next generation prostheses, which can cost up to 100,000 euros, are covered for these people who want to reintegrate.

That's not the only thing. There are other measures. We have an iconic institution called the Institution nationale des invalides that injured individuals, throughout their journey, and probably also at the end of their lives, can enter as patients and receive specific support.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Are there any circumstances under which, if they were to receive some other funding from the government, the disability amount they're receiving would be reduced?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: No, no. It's a scale based on a disability rate, and the portion is not reduced based on what is proposed in terms of the care path.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Waganall: Thank you.

In Canada, and what we've discovered in this committee, veterans care for veterans. A lot of them have developed programs or methods of reaching out to other veterans in order to improve their quality of life, and a lot of really good programs are available to them. Do you find that in France as well? Are there ways the government is engaging those groups, to use them as third parties to provide services, or to improve the welfare of veterans?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: Historically, this also happened in France.

Right after the First World War, it is true that the government was fairly restrained. Veterans associations organized themselves to set up their own structures and assistance programs.

For example, it was these veterans associations that, after the First World War, created vocational retraining schools. These schools were places where disabled individuals, who were missing an arm or a leg, could learn a new trade. At the very start, in the 1920s and 1930s, it was the veterans associations that set up these structures and programs. The situation is different these days, meaning that the government is, on the one hand, more present and, on the other, the veterans associations in France are quite aging.

• (1000)

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Waganall: So there aren't newer groups stepping in and doing this type of thing; the focus is more on the government care.

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: The new groups, as you call them, are struggling to establish a presence. There are large associations that are very well established in the landscape and they still work a lot for veterans, especially of Algeria. They are also becoming interested in young people from external operations. To be very clear, the community of veterans is less proactive than it was after the First World War.

I don't know if the commissioner agrees with me.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Waganall: I'll pass the rest of my time to Mr. McColeman.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Thank you.

I recall a program that was begun to help transition the Canadian veteran into the workplace, and it was specific to construction. Someone help me with the name of that program.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): It was Helmets to Hardhats.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Thank you.

The construction industry partnered with Veterans Affairs to help the veterans who had an interest in some kind of future in construction, be it in carpentry, plumbing, whatever the trade.

Is there anything like that in France as far as your transition programs are concerned?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: In France, there are reserved jobs that prioritize injured veterans. They have bridges to connect more easily with the public service.

Your question deals more specifically with the private sector. Some sectors of our economy are interested in recruiting veterans and perhaps injured soldiers.

Mr. Commissioner, do you have any additional information?

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: We are trying to establish enabling agreements with large companies to get them to hire injured soldiers. The main difficulty we are encountering is that the availability of companies doesn't strictly match the demand of wounded soldiers, particularly from a geographic perspective. The company may have a lot of job offers for injured soldiers in the Paris area, where there are large groups, but our injured soldiers may prefer a life in the provinces.

So that's the challenge we have right now.

[English]

Mr. Phil McColeman: Thank you.

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

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Thank you very much for coming.

I'd like to make reference to a question Ms. Waganall asked earlier regarding actively serving personnel who have been injured.

I'm contrasting the two different systems we have in Canada and the United States. In Canada we have what's called the universality of service, which means that if a soldier is unable to be deployed in any role he or she might be called upon to fill, then he or she is medically released. This contrasts with the situation in the United States, where they have modified duty for injured soldiers. So, for instance, if a battlefield soldier in the United States were to lose a leg in combat and be unable to perform the usual duties, that soldier could perform other duties in the military, could still be in the military and be a clerk or air traffic controller, whatever would suit their requirements. In Canada there is no such modified duty. If soldiers can't deploy in any capacity, they're released and they become veterans.

What is the status of that in France? Is there a modified duty such that someone who's injured and cannot perform all duties can still serve in the military in a non-combat role?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: Earlier, we were talking about the esprit de corps, something that translates in France as well. The armed forces, particularly the army, are trying to keep in their units people who have been wounded, either in uniform or in civvies. This is a relatively common practice in the French armed forces. It is a very concrete example of the esprit de corps. The armed forces do not abandon soldiers who have been wounded while serving.

• (1005)

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: If I may, I would add that there are soldiers with a prosthesis who are continuing to serve in military uniform within their regiment. In keeping with this esprit de corps, in early 2017, we created what we call leave for the wounded. This leave is given specifically to soldiers injured on external and domestic operations. It allows them to remain with their regiments for two years, despite an injury. They are attached to their regiments and can continue to follow regimental life.

We realized that it was essential, especially with regard to psychological injuries, to keep this fraternal bond between the unit and the injured individual. In addition, this leave allows injured individuals to retain their salaries for two years.

[English]

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Thank you.

Further to that, we've heard some testimony regarding our universality of service requirement. Some veterans have stated that they noticed they were becoming injured. For example, there were paratroopers who were starting to develop back pain, or active duty soldiers who were starting to get symptoms of PTSD, and they were afraid to report their symptoms, because if they were deemed not fit for the battlefield, they would be out of the military.

Would you agree that soldiers would be much more likely to report symptoms of injury if they knew that doing so would not end their military career?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: I'm not sure I understood the question.

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: I think so. They might talk more about their injuries, which may or may not be obvious, if they were sure they wouldn't be forced to leave the service.

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: I would like to add that there is a network within the regiments. This basically concerns the army. They have appointed first contact people, such as senior non-commissioned officers, or people with some seniority, to identify behavioural changes in young soldiers. They are identified from very low in the chain of command.

Culturally, I also believe that there is more recognition that soldiers can suffer psychological injuries. Military leaders are aware of this risk, and there has been great change in this area. So, people probably speak more freely.

[English]

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Thank you very much.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Thank you.

I'd like to change direction a bit.

With regard to service delivery, you have local offices. Wherever veterans are living in the country, they can go to a local office. We have geographic challenges in Canada. Our population density is much lower. We have about half your population, spread out over an area roughly the size of China, and most of our citizens live in cities. So we have vast areas where people live, where it's very difficult to provide any sort of service, not just military.

Again, this may not be relevant to France, but are there areas in France that are geographically isolated, and where it's difficult to provide local service for veterans?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: I spoke earlier about the office's territorial network. It has a service in all the regions that, I think, were established at the time of the French Revolution, so some time ago. The principle was, if I'm not mistaken, that anyone could cross the department on horseback in one day. That gives you an idea of the size of the departments. In practical terms, it means that it is fairly easy to access the services of the nearest Office national des anciens combattants in half a day, at the most. Having said that, I don't think you could reproduce it in Canada.

• (1010)

[English]

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you very much.

I want to come back to a question that was asked previously with regard to modified duty, and I want to be clear. You said that efforts are made to retain an injured soldier in a civilian capacity. What kind of jobs would that mean? I also wonder about the statement that a soldier stays in his or her regiment for two years on the same salary. What happens if that individual is unable to deploy? In Canada, if you're unable to deploy after two years, you're moved toward a medical release. Is it the same in France?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: As for the last point about leave for the wounded, needless to say, the injured person isn't within the regiment, but at home, for instance. We protect them by paying them a salary for two years. That's the key point.

Excuse me, but the first question—

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: You said that soldiers are often in a civilian capacity.

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: Actually, in military training many soldiers may be deployed. So they must be able to take part in an external operation. There are also a number of civilians who are generally assigned support tasks, like fixing or maintaining equipment, for instance. With any military training, there is always a need for a civilian workforce, for people who can't be deployed abroad. Soldiers who have been injured and who can't be deployed elsewhere could therefore take jobs like these.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Okay. Is there difficulty in terms of the individual soldier who cannot be deployed? There doesn't seem to be a place for them within the organization, and they are simply no longer part of the military force.

Here in Canada there's been a lot of angst among those who want to stay in but who can't be deployed, and they're very unhappy about being forced out. Does that kind of situation arise within your ranks?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: Local commanders have the very big responsibility of supporting injured soldiers, which may be done by rehabilitation through sports. This is an essential point for which we've created a real policy.

Finally, there will always be what you mention, which is the risk of a gap between those who are deployed on an external operation and those who remain. We try to support those who remain as much as possible.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Okay, thank you.

We talked about long-term care and the fact that injuries are dealt with in medical centres or clinics. I wondered why the ONACVG decided to close the rehabilitation centres that it did administer. What were the reasons behind that decision? They were administered until January of this year and apparently now have been disposed of. I'm wondering why that decision was made.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré (Committee Researcher): There was a translation problem.

Ms. Mathysen mentioned the retraining schools that were transferred to the office.

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: Right.

The office had 10 vocational retraining schools. These schools were created immediately after the First World War to enable disabled veterans to learn a new trade.

We have seen that, for years, these vocational retraining schools were no longer receiving soldiers or veterans. Most of the people using these schools were disabled individuals who were in no way connected with defence or the armed forces.

The Ministère de la Défense, now the Ministère des Armées, decided not to close these vocational retraining schools, but simply to transfer them. These schools still exist, but they now come under the Ministère des Solidarités et de la Santé. I repeat that, for a very

long time, these schools haven't received veterans or disabled veterans.

• (1015)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Bratina, we'll close with you for six minutes.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Thank you.

At what point during active service are soldiers made aware of the benefits they might receive as veterans? Is there any discussion with active service soldiers during their period of service about the veterans benefits, or does that come upon their departure?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: As for the veteran's card, ONACVG's mission is to go to the regiments, the military training, to explain to those being deployed on an external operation that they can request this card. As I have already said, they can do so as soon as they have accumulated 120 days of external operations. At that time, their rights they get by having the card are explained to them.

[English]

Mr. Bob Bratina: Okay.

Are there issues specific to female veterans? The French military has a proud history of participation by females. Are there any specific issues that come to mind with regard to women veterans?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: Not to our knowledge. There are no particular issues. The symptoms and proportions are the same. There haven't been any studies specifically on that.

[English]

Mr. Bob Bratina: I see.

One of the issues, of course, that many armies faced was sexual harassment, and that led, in cases that we've heard about in our committee, to stresses related to that among female veterans. Is there a program or well-defined policy with regard to that in the French military?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: This is something that the Ministère des Armées also considered. A few years ago, it created the Thémis unit, the role of which is specifically to consider questions like that. Anyone can contact the unit's telephone service to report cases of harassment or other actions like that.

Again, these cases are not solely attributed to operations. It's regimental life. It is possible, in the course of operations, that the circumstances may make the risk a little higher. Regardless, we created this unit a few years ago to consider that issue.

[English]

Mr. Bob Bratina: Yes.

Earlier I asked a question about homeless veterans, and I'm not sure I understood one point.

In Canada we're experiencing veterans who have decided to opt out of society and live in missions or live on the street and not be identified as veterans, to not seek help. We often find those individuals with veterans who will go to areas where these individuals congregate as homeless people, at a mission or someplace like that. They find them and bring them back into the system so they can get benefits and so on.

Do I understand from your comments that this is not a very large problem with regard to French veterans? It is a problem we are dealing with, but it doesn't sound as though it's at a similar level in your experience.

• (1020)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: We have heard about veterans in the United States and Canada who are homeless and destitute. France is very little affected by this phenomenon, or has seen little of it. Still, we have never had such cases publicized. It can certainly happen, but the number of these cases is low.

[English]

Mr. Bob Bratina: That's really interesting. It's probably something we should investigate further, the relationship of the French military veteran to his former duties as an active serviceperson, and compare it with the American and Canadian experience, because it is a big problem for us.

I asked as well about esprit de corps in comrades. We found that many felt disconnected, especially the younger veterans. They could not go, for instance, to our Legions because they felt they were for the older veterans from days gone by, who didn't relate to the younger veteran, so they became disengaged from their former comrades, from the military, and so on.

Would that be the same in the French experience, or is it different?

[Translation]

Mr. Frédéric Charlet: A few years ago, we could actually consider that the old veterans associations, that is to say, former soldiers, that were well-established, did not take young veterans sufficiently into account. I think things are changing. At the same time, although they are not very powerful, there are other associations of former soldiers of external operations that have been created. They do not, however, have the clout of the old associations.

These two worlds communicate more today. A young person who goes to an old association today is well-received, definitely better than there may have been a few years ago.

Mr. Alexandre Coyo: If I may, I would add that, with respect to this last combat generation, we have the responsibility of communicating in the way they communicate, in other words using social networks and doing better online. We are very interested in what Canada is doing on the Veterans Affairs Canada, or VAC, file. This seems to be a digital formula that might interest our current combat generations.

[English]

Mr. Bob Bratina: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

This ends our round of questioning.

On behalf of the committee today, I'd like to thank both of you for taking time out of your schedule to work us towards best practice with regard to our veterans and the men and women who have served. If you have anything to follow up, such as paperwork, send it to our clerk, and he will get it through to the committee.

Thank you very much and have a great day.

I will suspend for about 30 seconds here to leave the video conference feed, and then we'll come back with some committee business. After that, we'll be out of here.

• (1020)

(Pause)

• (1025)

The Chair: I guess we haven't lost anybody, so we'll come back and get started.

I'm going to welcome Phil.

You're officially here as a critic. Congratulations on your new role.

I'm going to turn it over to our clerk to make it official.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Jean-Denis Kusion): Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition. I am now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

It has been moved by Cathay Wagantall that Phil McColeman be elected as first vice-chair of the committee. Are there any further motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Phil McColeman duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Thank you.

On the House working side, we need to fix the subcommittee. I need a motion of sorts, and I will turn to Colin Fraser.

You have one, I believe, to replace Ms. Lockhart?

Mr. Colin Fraser: Yes, I move that Emmanuella replace Alaina on the subcommittee.

The Chair: Okay, do I see agreement on that?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: With that, I need a motion to adjourn.

Thank you, Mr. Bratina.

All in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you, everybody.

The meeting is adjourned.

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