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—

Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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• (1540)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

I welcome everyone, all our members and our guests, to the 47th meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. I particularly want to welcome our witnesses, including Mr. Fraser from West Nova.

With that, you know the process. We'll give you time for your presentation. Then we'll go to seven-minute rounds of questions and five-minute rounds after that. We'll do that for both sessions. I'll also need a few minutes at the end of today's meeting for a couple of internal issues that the committee has to deal with.

Welcome, Mr. Fraser. We'll turn it over to you for your presentation.

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

It's a great honour to appear before the committee today.

I am very pleased that my Bill C-311 was passed unanimously at second reading in the House of Commons, so that it is before you today.

[English]

I want to thank you and acknowledge the efforts over the years of many members from all parties who in previous parliaments brought forward bills similar to this one as private members' bills. I would note that in particular Dan Harris, a member of the New Democratic Party, worked on this in the last Parliament. The bill made it to third reading in the House before dying on the Order Paper before the last election call.

I want to preface this with some remarks about the importance of Remembrance Day. Our beautiful and peaceful country did not happen by luck. It was built, brick by brick, by those who have gone before us, those who have protected and defended our liberties, values, and rights. The people who have served our country in our armed forces deserve our utmost respect.

November 11 is Remembrance Day. That marks the day in 1918 when the Great War, World War I, ended. It has come to symbolize and to solemnly remind us of those who have paid the supreme sacrifice in service to our country. From Ypres, Flanders Fields, and Vimy Ridge in World War I; to Dieppe, Italy, Africa, Normandy, and

the Pacific in World War II; and to Korea, peacekeeping missions, the Gulf War, Afghanistan, and other conflicts around the world, there is a continuum of bravery and dedication by our Canadian Forces. Past, present, and future, we must honour them and their sacrifice. It is right that a grateful country appropriately pays tribute and thanks, and remembers our fallen and those who serve.

I therefore believe that Remembrance Day is very important for our country and for all Canadians. I think we should be raising its profile where and when possible, and we should ensure that it is being marked appropriately.

I note in special reflection that in April of this year, 2017, we mark the 100th anniversary of the battle of Vimy Ridge. It's a day that marks a special place in many Canadians' minds. It will be celebrated properly but remembered solemnly by our whole country. I think it's appropriate that we have this discussion the same year that we mark the 100th anniversary of the battle of Vimy Ridge.

You've all been provided with materials relating to my private member's bill, Bill C-311. I want to talk a little bit about the mechanics of the bill.

First, if you look at the provisions that it seeks to amend in the Holidays Act, you'll note that it seeks to add the word "legal" before the word "holiday" with reference to Remembrance Day in the Holidays Act. Other holidays that are specifically mentioned in the act are Canada Day and Victoria Day, which are, in that act, noted as legal holidays. For Remembrance Day, it is noted as just "holiday". Proposed subsection 3(1) in my bill seeks to add the word "legal".

With regard to proposed subsections 3(2) and (3), as I mentioned in my speech in the House of Commons, I propose that they be deleted, that they be struck from the bill entirely. My intent in bringing this bill forward was to elevate the status of Remembrance Day to ensure that we are giving it its due and putting it on a level equal to the other days in the Holidays Act. Proposed subsections 3(2) and (3) do not achieve these goals. I have realized since submitting my bill for consideration that they are problematic.

For example, proposed subsection 3(2) basically says that when November 11 is on a Saturday or Sunday, it would then put the holiday to the Monday. I don't believe that is the right thing to do. November 11 is Remembrance Day, and that is the day it should always be marked. It is not about having a holiday, so proposed subsection 3(2), I would suggest, should be struck.

Proposed subsection 3(3) refers to the flag at half-mast. It seemed like a good idea. I was advised that bringing this forward and then deleting it would be easier than trying to add it afterwards. However, having reflected on this, I realize it's problematic.

The proposed subsection reads as follows:

(3) On Remembrance Day, the Canadian flag on the Peace Tower shall be lowered to half-mast.

It's problematic in that if, for example, the Queen were in Ottawa that day to mark Remembrance Day, then her standard, by protocol, would fly over the Peace Tower. It would conflict with this provision. I therefore have no difficulty asking for this provision to be struck as well.

To remove proposed subsections 3(2) and (3), either your committee can vote them down at clause-by-clause or I can draft an amendment, which I'd be happy to do, to remove these provisions.

I'll now turn to what this bill does and what it does not do. This is a really important part of my presentation, because there's been some misinformation, or misunderstanding, about this.

First, what does the bill do? It's a modest measure to add consistency to the language in the federal Holidays Act to add the word "legal" and ensure that the same language that is used for Canada Day and Victoria Day is used for Remembrance Day. I believe this elevates the status, but at the very least it adds consistency to the language in our federal Holidays Act.

I believe it also affirms Parliament's commitment that November 11 is a very important day in Canada, an important day of solemn remembrance and reflection for those who have sacrificed for our country. I also believe it gives pause for us to reflect on the ways in which we honour the service of our service members, and ensures that we are appropriately remembering their service and appropriately honouring Remembrance Day.

What doesn't the bill do? This is really important. It doesn't make a national holiday. It can't. It's not within purview of Parliament to do that. It is up to the provinces to determine whether there is a statutory holiday, a day off, for their jurisdiction.

It doesn't give anyone the day off who doesn't already have it. Anybody in the federal civil service already would have November 11 as a day off because of collective agreements that have been reached. It may clarify, I suppose, at the federal level that this is to be the case, but it wouldn't give anyone the day off who doesn't already have it.

Third, it doesn't give any students a day off school who don't already have that day off school by virtue of provincial statute in their jurisdiction. Many provinces in Canada already have the day as a statutory holiday. Ontario and Quebec do not have it as a statutory holiday. Manitoba has a different law in place. Nova Scotia has the

Remembrance Day Act, which in effect gives people the day off, but it's not technically a statutory holiday.

This bill will not make it a national holiday, will not give anyone the day off who doesn't already have it, and will not give any students the day off school who do not already have it. That is within the jurisdiction of the provinces.

The two main arguments that I've heard in opposition...and I know that Mr. White from the Dominion command will be testifying today. It's right to think about this, and I totally respect the Legion Dominion command's point of view, but I disagree. Their argument is that the children should be in school on Remembrance Day to ensure that they are marking the solemn occasion.

What I would say to this is that, first of all, this bill doesn't have anything to do with that, because it doesn't make it a day off. It can't. That's up to the provinces. But in response to the children being in school on Remembrance Day, November 11 is sometimes on a Saturday or Sunday. I don't think anyone would suggest that it would be a problem for schoolchildren to have veterans coming in the week leading up to Remembrance Day to mark the occasion, learn about it, and then perhaps have an opportunity to attend the cenotaph with their parents.

Second, in Nova Scotia, where I come from, Veterans' Week, in the days leading up to Remembrance Day, is well marked. Veterans come into the schools, mark the occasion, teach children about Remembrance Day, and then the children have November 11 to attend with their family.

The other argument is that it could be just another day off. Again, this bill has nothing to do with giving people the day off, but to that I would say that we've seen increasing attendance at Remembrance Day ceremonies in jurisdictions where this is a holiday. That's particularly true in Nova Scotia, which I can attest to, and we'll hear evidence relating to that on Thursday, I believe.

I would also say, though, that we must ensure that it does not become just another day off, that it does not become like Victoria Day, for example, which is always on a Monday for a long weekend. We must ensure that education goes along with any change in provincial ways of marking the occasion.

• (1545)

In conclusion, I'd like to say that I believe this bill is well reasoned and is a modest bill in what it does. The fact that it adds consistency in language and elevates Remembrance Day to the same level as Canada Day and Victoria Day in federal statutes is appropriate, and it affirms Parliament's commitment to ensure that this very important day of reflection and thanks to our fallen is given its due respect.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'm happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

•(1550)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you very much, Mr. Fraser.

I didn't say it earlier, but this afternoon we are of course dealing with Bill C-311, your private member's bill.

I gave you a few extra seconds to wrap up. With that, I'll open it up to questions.

Mr. Samson, please.

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

Thank you very much, Mr. Fraser, for coming in today and sharing with us your bill and some of your suggestions.

I'd like to dig a little deeper and get personal. Let's start with you. Why did you want to bring this bill forward?

Mr. Colin Fraser: I remember as a child always marking Remembrance Day with my family and going to the cenotaph on the 11th. I had the opportunity to do that with my family because we didn't have to go to school that day. Also, the important stories we heard from veterans who came into our schools in the days leading up to Remembrance Day always stuck with me. It was always very important for our community to show its support for our veterans by going to the ceremonies. Where people are able to take the time off work or do not have to be in school, I think it's a wonderful thing that we see increasing attendance at ceremonies.

Also, I had the very good fortune, after graduating from university, to be a tour guide at Vimy Ridge in France. That really opened my eyes to the sacrifice that Canadians made and to the pride that Canadians have in their service members and what they accomplished, not only at Vimy Ridge but throughout the continuum of service we have seen in our country. That makes us such a wonderful country to live in. Anything we can do to shine a light on Remembrance Day, to elevate the status of this important day, and to make sure we're marking it appropriately is very important to me.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you. I hope you're going to have an opportunity on April 9 to go to Vimy Ridge to participate in that very important day. Since you've worked there, it has an effect on you as well.

As a former superintendent of schools in Nova Scotia, I have to say that I agree 100% with you that the work being done in the schools prior to the day—especially in Nova Scotia, where it's a holiday—is exceptional. We always have someone coming in to talk with students. There are all kinds of activities, and there's a curriculum that's focused on learning more about the importance of that day. As you indicated, I've noticed a big increase in numbers in the last five or six years, with a lot of students and young families coming in. That's extremely positive. It's some more light that we can bring to it.

Tell me more about your constituency. What do the people in your constituency think? Are they all in favour? To what extent? You have some Legions as well.

Mr. Colin Fraser: I do. I have many Legions in my riding. I'm very pleased to meet with them on a regular basis and certainly to

speak to them about this bill. I've had nothing but positive conversations about the intent of this bill. The Remembrance Day ceremonies that the Legions put on in my riding are very well attended. The attachment people have to their Legions and the respect they have for them is very well received, and rightfully so.

The conversations I've had generally with the public in the area I represent have been all positive. I've not had one negative comment with regard to elevating the status of Remembrance Day to ensure we're properly and appropriately marking this solemn day of remembrance. Also, I shouldn't limit this to just my constituency. You asked me that question, but I've heard from many people right across the country with the same point of view. In a modest way, I think this bill does what I intended it to do.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Did you say that all the Legions in your riding are in support of this bill?

Mr. Colin Fraser: The Legion members are. I understand, obviously, that we'll be hearing from the Dominion command in the second round today. I respect their opinion, and they'll share that. It's the Legion members I've been speaking to who have given me their thoughts. We'll be hearing from a Legion member in my riding on Thursday, I believe.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I wonder if the reason behind that, because I'm hearing the same thing, is that it's a holiday in Nova Scotia, and has been for a long time. They recognize it and have been able to openly participate as families on that special day. Do you think that may have an influence on their support?

•(1555)

Mr. Colin Fraser: It may. If you see it working well, then obviously you're confident that it's the correct thing to mark the occasion in that way.

Again, though, this bill of course doesn't do that. If it encourages provinces to reflect on the way in which they mark Remembrance Day in their jurisdiction, then certainly they can have that debate. This bill in a modest way elevates the status of Remembrance Day and puts it on equal footing, as I think it should, with Canada Day in federal law.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I don't want to put you on the spot, but can you tell me which provinces do not have—

Mr. Colin Fraser: Ontario and Quebec do not have it as a statutory holiday. Nova Scotia and Manitoba have a separate way of dealing with it. In Nova Scotia in particular, they have the Remembrance Day Act. It's not technically a statutory holiday, because the employer can give the employee the day off or another day off in lieu of the November 11 date. In practice it works out to be November 11.

Ontario and Quebec do not have it as a statutory holiday.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): We do in Newfoundland.

An hon. member: Of course. It all starts in Newfoundland, doesn't it?

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: Everything does.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you, Mr. Samson, for your questions.

I welcome Mr. Brassard to our committee and turn it over to him for seven minutes.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to be here today, with my honourable colleague Mr. Waugh and the others.

Mr. Fraser and I sit on the veterans affairs committee. I know that he's very sincere when he deals with veterans issues, and I can sense the sincerity in his private member's bill here.

You talked earlier about the Legion. As you said, we'll be hearing from Mr. White, Dominion secretary with the Dominion command of the Royal Canadian Legion. They represent roughly 300,000 members. You said that some members will be coming in on Thursday.

In previous testimony, Mr. White said the following:

The Legion's position on this issue is our concern that Canadians, if given the time off as a legal holiday, will not take the time to remember. It may simply become another long weekend or mid-week break.

What would you say to that, Mr. Fraser?

Mr. Colin Fraser: I appreciate the opportunity to address that.

First of all, this does not make a day off. Beyond that, if I were to answer the question, it would go outside of the scope of what this bill does. But I'll take it on, because I believe that in the jurisdictions where it is a day off to mark the solemn occasion of Remembrance Day, it works very well. We have not seen any diminishment at all in the affinity Canadians have for veterans or in the attendance at these solemn events. We've seen an increase.

I think that's the answer. We know that this will not be just another day off. It won't be like Victoria Day long weekend, for example, with Victoria Day always being on a Monday. I also think it provides an opportunity for veterans to come into the schools in the week leading up, in Veterans' Week. If it were on November 11, of course, they would either have to be in the school or at the cenotaph. They wouldn't be able to do both. This provides them that opportunity.

Finally, again, I totally respect the Dominion command and Mr. White and their point of view, but I wonder what question they actually asked of their members. I don't know the answer to that. If it was, "Do you support this being a national holiday?", that's not the right question that's pertinent to this bill.

Mr. John Brassard: Okay.

Everyone in this Parliament, and everyone who's come before us, has always respected veterans and the price they've paid, and their families have paid, for their sacrifices. In what other more effective ways, in addition to this, can we honour our veterans? Perhaps I can ask you, as a member of the veterans affairs committee, for your answer on that.

Mr. Colin Fraser: That's a very good question. As you know, on the veterans affairs committee we are working on recommendations about how we ensure that our veterans are being taken care of by our country. I think that's the first commitment, to ensure that as a government we are taking care of our veterans and offering them the compassion and care they deserve.

As far as commemoration is concerned, we've seen other ways that our country can commemorate the way in which veterans are marked in this country. We can always make improvements on that. Education has to be the first and foremost piece to ensure that students across the country and people across the country are constantly reminded of the importance of Remembrance Day, what that means for our country, and how important that day is to ensure that we remember the fallen.

• (1600)

Mr. John Brassard: As you said at the top of your remarks, seven bills have come before us in the past. They've either failed or died on the Order Paper. Why should this bill be passed?

Mr. Colin Fraser: I think the last bill should have passed. It died on the Order Paper. For one reason or another it didn't get done. It was at third reading just before the election.

I've looked into some of the bills previous to that, some of them backdating quite a long time ago. The wording was quite different in them, so I'm sure there were substantive reasons why they didn't get passed.

I think if people understand what this bill is trying to accomplish, they'll recognize that it's a bill that Parliament should easily pass, in that it does add consistency to the language in the Holidays Act and affirms Parliament's recognition of Remembrance Day as one of the most important days, if not the most important, in our calendar. I can't answer all of the questions in terms of the history, but I know that it's the right thing to do now.

Mr. John Brassard: Is there anything from an ancillary standpoint that you've thought of since you introduced this bill? You've already spoken about proposed subsections 3(2) and (3). I guess they would be redundant, considering the argument you put forward before, and that's why you would look for them to be deleted.

From an ancillary impact standpoint, Mr. Fraser, have you thought of anything that would be affected by the passing of this bill?

Mr. Colin Fraser: I don't think there's anything of great substance, other than ensuring clarity and consistency in the law that in the federal statute we will say that the same language should be used for Remembrance Day as we use for Canada Day and Victoria Day, and Parliament affirming this important day by saying that we recognize that there's an inconsistency in the language, so we're shining a light on it and saying that Remembrance Day is important. I think any chance we get to raise the profile of Remembrance Day, it's the right thing for Parliament to do.

Substantively, though, are there ancillary or other problems that could create unforeseen consequences? I don't know of any.

Mr. John Brassard: I think I'm good for now, Chair.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you very much, Mr. Brassard.

I'll move to Mr. Nantel, please, for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

Do you understand French?

Mr. Colin Fraser: Yes, I understand it.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Great.

First, thank you for paying so much attention to Remembrance Day. Actually, I don't think we can talk about it enough.

Last year, I had the opportunity to visit the Beaumont-Hamel site. Now I can tell you that I don't see July 1 the same way anymore. I observe the mourning from morning until noon, ideally by wearing forget-me-nots. It is too easy to forget events like this, especially when there is little video archive.

In this regard, it was probably a little more difficult to document the First World War than the Second. Any action that will allow us to realize the chance we have, as a society, and the sacrifices that have been made for us to live here is valid. It is true that the gist of your idea has been proposed many times.

We always expect the Legion to agree, and that proposals like these will be received unanimously, much like chicken soup. Yet, how do you explain that we have been circling this for almost 10 years? Do you think that it can be explained by the disagreement on how to honour our veterans, and the split between veterans, and between the Legion and the associations?

What do you think? Honestly, I think that should naturally be a consensus and that we should have taken these steps ages ago.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Thank you for the question.

I don't know exactly why the Legion doesn't agree. I know that many Legion members are in favour of amending the act through my bill. In my opinion, some people think it institutes a national holiday, which is unfortunate, since that isn't the case. Honestly, it's a much more modest bill. I believe that some people feel that the time isn't appropriate and that students should stay in school. I understand it, although I disagree.

Otherwise, I don't question the motives people may have to oppose my bill, but I think it's very important to have accurate information.

• (1605)

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Absolutely.

It is to be hoped that the proponents of both positions will listen to the deliberations of this meeting and hear your arguments, so that

Mr. White will respond to what you are talking about, and we will get to the end of this debate.

There is the aspect of managing work schedules. I don't know anything about it, so I'm asking the question. If it is a federal bill that creates a statutory holiday, will it affect all federally chartered companies like banks, for example?

Mr. Colin Fraser: No. I have already been advised that this will not change anything for companies and entities that are subject to federal regulation. The bill only seeks to ensure consistency in the terms. It doesn't change anything for employees and employers.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you.

I have no further questions.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you, Mr. Nantel.

We will move now to Mr. Breton, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Fraser, thank you for being with us today to speak to your bill.

On Sunday morning, I had lunch with a veteran of the last war. He talked to me about all the sacrifices he had to make in those years. This is always extremely moving, and it makes us think further about what more we can do for our veterans. There should probably be an alternative to study.

I'll continue along the same lines as Mr. Nantel, who had started to talk about the financial and legal impacts of this bill. Some good questions have already been asked, and I don't want to repeat them. I'll be very pragmatic, and you can be as well.

In its current form, Remembrance Day has a financial impact on the working conditions of federally regulated employees. Is that correct?

Mr. Colin Fraser: Yes. This holiday is already set out in the working conditions of employees subject to federal regulations.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Your bill is intended to make this holiday, which is already a public holiday, a legal holiday. As I understand it, it would also apply to employees who are subject to federal regulations. Is that correct?

Mr. Colin Fraser: It is only an amendment to the Holidays Act. The bill only amends the federal legislation.

Please allow me to switch to English.

[*English*]

It's just to make sure I'm being perfectly clear.

It changes the statute that governs holidays at the federal level, which is the Holidays Act, and it adds the word "legal".

There is some question about whether that has any actual legal impact, because it doesn't change anything substantively for any employees at the federal level. In response to Mr. Nantel's question, it has nothing to do with changing the contract that somebody would have, for example, as an employee at a bank. It doesn't have any substantive change. All it's doing is confirming, for example, the contracts that are already in place through collective agreements with federal employees. It would have no substantive change with regard to that. It's a gesture that some could call symbolic, but I see it as actually raising the profile and putting it in the same consistent wording as Canada Day.

• (1610)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Basically, your bill has no additional impact on businesses or public bodies that aren't subject to federal regulation.

[English]

Mr. Colin Fraser: Exactly.

As far as I am aware, there is absolutely no impact whatsoever to any employer, any private contract, or any public contract. There is no substantive difference.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Or on other federal regulations or acts.

[English]

Mr. Colin Fraser: Right. Exactly.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Okay.

Your bill aims to institute a legal holiday, which is very symbolic. I say that with all due respect to your bill.

[English]

Mr. Colin Fraser: That would be a fair assessment.

I see it a little differently. I believe that while it doesn't necessarily change the behaviour of individuals and employers or employee relationships, it does say that we are going to make the language consistent with respect to Remembrance Day, that we are going to at least symbolically elevate the status of it in federal law to ensure that, when it comes to language, it is treated the same as Canada Day and Victoria Day. More important, it affirms Parliament's commitment to ensure that this day is seen as just as important as other days in federal statutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Right.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): We'll move right along. Thank you very much.

We'll turn it over to Mr. Waugh for five minutes.

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

What is really the impact for federal employees? I'm going to give you an example. I was at CTV, the national broadcaster. We all had it in our agreement at one time that we were going to get November 11 as a holiday. Over time, CTV decided that it wasn't a holiday, so everybody works on November 11.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: Don't look at me.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I'm looking at you. You were in Toronto, the centre of the universe, when this decision was made.

Anyway, I'm just going to tell you that with federal agreements now, this could be a bargaining chip with federal employees. Is it a national holiday? You're saying that it's a legal holiday. Canada Day is, Victoria Day is, and you're saying that Remembrance Day is, yet "I don't have it in my collective agreement". You can see where this is a wedge with federal employees.

If I'm a broadcaster, I'm regulated by the CRTC. We lost that right. Now you're telling me that I have to go back to try to get it to be on the same level as Canada Day and Victoria Day, which in most provinces and territories, if not all, are legal holidays.

Mr. Colin Fraser: On the last point, Victoria Day is not a statutory holiday in four provinces, even though in federal law it's called a "legal holiday". There can be differences. That's exactly the point. This can change only the federal statute. My understanding is that this has no impact on collective agreements, collective rights, and that it's not a legal issue with regard to changing the language. This is simply adding consistency to the language, which is why I suggest that it may be correct to argue that it's a symbolic change, but it's already in the act, right?

Remembrance Day, let's not forget, is already in the Holidays Act. This is about adding the word "legal". Many people say that it was an oversight in the original drafting of the bill and that it should have been in the Holidays Act to begin with, so we're just correcting a past error. As to whether somebody can use that as a bargaining chip at some future negotiation, I suppose that's possible, but I don't think that should deter us from doing the right thing.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Why is it a bill, then, instead of a motion?

Mr. Colin Fraser: That's a fair question. I think, though, that what it does is fix a past wrong with regard to the language, and that has to be done by another bill. It has to be done by another act, which is what this is doing.

You're right. As for raising the status of Remembrance Day to encourage people to honour this important day, that could have been done by a motion but it wouldn't have tidied up the language, which I'm trying to do at the same time.

• (1615)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes.

Are you pitting provinces against one another?

Mr. Colin Fraser: No.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Four or five already don't.... Well, two don't call it a holiday right now: Quebec and Ontario.

Mr. Colin Fraser: It's a fair question. What I would say is that it's up to each province or each jurisdiction, each province and territory, to determine for itself what days are statutory holidays and how they mark the solemn occasion of Remembrance Day. That's up to them and their elected officials. In no way am I trying to encroach on that. If this has some impact on causing people to think about asking questions about how we can increase attendance at Remembrance Day ceremonies, I'd be okay with that, but that would be totally incidental to this bill and what it aims to achieve.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I think you know where I'm coming from. If at CTV, for example, they were where we used to be, which was coast to coast.... Let's say Nova Scotia has it, Ontario doesn't, and Quebec doesn't. All of a sudden people are comparing holidays, right? They're saying, "In Ontario you get six a year, and in Saskatchewan you get seven, so I'm out one day." That's where I think this is going to go down the road, and then all of a sudden they're finger-pointing and asking questions about how much this would cost. For businesses, we know that it has changed dramatically coast to coast. For November 11, you have to pay benefits, usually.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Again, it's up to each province to determine for itself how it marks the very important, solemn day of remembrance. Manitoba does it differently from Nova Scotia, and they do it differently from Alberta, but they each in their own fashion have come up with a way to do it. Ontario used to have this as a statutory holiday and decided in their legislature to change that.

Some people think that was the wrong decision. It's not for me to say or to opine about. All I can do is say that we have federal legislation before us that has inconsistent language with regard to Remembrance Day. We can fix that and that's what I'm seeking to do.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you.

We'll move over now to Mr. Vandal for five minutes.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Fraser. It sounds very clear to me.

First of all, I am learning something. I was under the impression that Remembrance Day was a national holiday to begin with. It has been in Manitoba for as long as I can remember. It's a very cherished day to share with the Legions and the schools and the churches.

Your bill essentially adds consistency to the legal definition of "holiday", and it adds significance or status to Remembrance Day. That's what it does, essentially.

With regard to your proposed subsection 3(2), which was deleted, was it your original intention, when you crafted it, to make it an actual holiday? I'm just asking for my own information.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Proposed subsection 3(2) is still in there. I'm suggesting that either you agree to vote it down in clause-by-clause or I'll prepare a draft amendment for you to consider. It has to do

with whether or not you put it to the Monday for the holiday, which is wrong. It should just be on November 11.

Again, that wouldn't have had any effect with regard to changing the day in each province. That would only be federally legislated.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Your recommendation is that we remove that during committee.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Yes.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Do you have any recommendation in terms of adding to it in order to make it better?

Mr. Colin Fraser: No. I think November 11 is on the 11th. It should always be marked on the 11th at 11 o'clock, and—

Mr. Dan Vandal: Got it. Thank you.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Okay.

Mr. Dan Vandal: We don't have a lot of time, so I'll pass it over to Mr. Schiefke.

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Thank you for allowing me some time to ask a question.

First of all, Mr. Fraser, I want to say thank you for all the effort you've put into drafting this bill. The passion that you have for this issue is evident in the way you've answered the questions thus far, so thank you very much.

Speaking as someone from Quebec, I'm wondering how this bill would in any way affect the way in which Quebecers celebrate or commemorate Remembrance Day. Would this bill in any way move or work toward Quebec becoming one of the provinces that adopt a national holiday, if you will?

Mr. Colin Fraser: What it would do, as we've already done with this bill so far, is shine a light on the importance of Remembrance Day—having a discussion in Parliament about what Remembrance Day means, making the language consistent in the federal law, and if it passes, having Parliament affirm, and members of Parliament from Quebec affirm, the importance of Remembrance Day to them and to their constituents.

That may have an impact, sparking conversations in provinces like Quebec, which don't already have it as a statutory holiday—conversations such as, "Are we honouring that day appropriately? Are we giving due respect to the veterans and the fallen?" That's a perfectly legitimate debate.

This bill doesn't do that for Quebec, however. It's up to each province to decide for itself.

• (1620)

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Okay.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Do you have more questions?

Mr. Peter Schiefke: No, thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Then I'll turn it over to Mr. Brassard again.

You have five minutes.

Mr. John Brassard: I'm not sure I'm going to take all that time.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): That's fine.

Mr. John Brassard: I don't want to make this sound disrespectful, Mr. Fraser. We have a tremendous working relationship. But my sense after this is that there are more questions than there are answers to what this bill is actually intended to do. Any time there is confusion, it creates doubt, so I just want to make sure we clarify what you're trying to do.

I know that you spoke about affirmation on the symbolism of Remembrance Day coming out of Parliament. To pick up on something that Mr. Waugh spoke about, we could easily have done that had you presented a motion to Parliament. I think you probably would have had all-party support on the affirmation of Remembrance Day and the significance of it, because not one of us is doubting the significance, the reverence, of Remembrance Day and what it means to this country.

Is there any way, or are we now past the point, that we can move this into a motion as opposed to a bill? Do you know whether we're capable of doing that at all?

Mr. Colin Fraser: I'm not sure, but I'm not sure I'm going to look into it either.

Mr. John Brassard: I think the process would have been better served had you started off in that direction.

Mr. Colin Fraser: I appreciate that, but I think the problem is that you'd end up with the inconsistent language in the act. You can't change that with a motion.

Mr. John Brassard: Can you be a little more clear for me on the inconsistent language that you're talking about? I've heard a lot of discussion here. What exactly are you trying to clear up?

Mr. Colin Fraser: Fair enough.

Canada Day, "July 1, not being a Sunday, is a legal holiday". Remembrance Day "is a holiday and shall be kept and observed as such throughout Canada". Victoria Day, the "Monday immediately preceding May 25 is a legal holiday". For Canada Day and Victoria Day, it's a "legal holiday", and for Remembrance day it says, "is a holiday."

There is an inconsistency in language there, which I submit was probably a drafting error when it was originally done, and we should fix it.

Mr. John Brassard: Right.

In any of the research we've done—and we asked the Library of Parliament, as I'm sure you did, about the definitions of "legal" and "holiday". The answer we got back was that the distinction in terminology between a legal holiday and a holiday in the Holidays Act does not have any legal effects at all, as the three days in question are given the same treatment in other statutes and regulations governing working conditions for federally regulated employees.

My understanding from reading this and all of the information that we've had is that there's really no distinction between them, so are we actually clarifying something there?

Mr. Colin Fraser: If a Canadian were to read this, they would see that there is different wording regarding Canada Day and Remembrance Day. I think we should fix that. If a lawyer is reading this and comes to the conclusion that there's no difference, then that's fine. That means that the other questions regarding collective agreements and what Mr. Waugh was suggesting earlier are fine and there is no problem.

I think we should, for a plain-language reading of this for ordinary Canadians, make sure the language is consistent. I agree with you that it may not do a whole lot, but it shines a light on this important day and it allows us to have the debate in Parliament and fix a drafting error that was made a long time ago.

• (1625)

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

I will just reiterate that my line of questioning is not to diminish the value of what you're trying to do here. I really believe that your intent is sincere. We're just trying to better understand it. I'm certainly trying to better understand it so that I can bring it back to my caucus colleagues and try to explain to them exactly what your bill represents.

Initially there was a lot of confusion within our caucus. There probably still is, but I am not doubting for a minute your intent and your sincerity in trying to raise the prominence of Remembrance Day and what it should mean to Canadians if it isn't at that level already.

Thank you, sir.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Brassard.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you.

There is just a comment from Mr. Samson, and then we'll go to Mr. Nantel.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I just want to make a comment.

I think bringing some consistency to this is very important. If someone is reading it and its definition is different but it means the same thing, then why is the definition not consistent?

As for the definitions, I would say that bringing some consistency to them is the best approach, along with bringing more focus and more light and discussion to this. Really, it's the question of bringing some consistency around it by having the same wording for the three holidays.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Nantel has a comment as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I'm going to ask you a question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Colin Fraser: You may speak in French if you wish.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: It's okay. Let's try to get through this.

No matter what the provinces do or decide with that specific day, what is the difference between July 1, Victoria Day, and Remembrance Day? What is the difference? For example, why is July 1 a super holiday everywhere and why is it not for Victoria Day? What would it be for Remembrance Day?

Mr. Colin Fraser: It's up to the provinces to make it a statutory holiday to concord with the federal act, if they so desire. In response to an earlier question, I said that Victoria Day, for example, is in the Holidays Act as a federal statutory holiday but it's not a statutory holiday with a day off in four of the provinces. It's up to the provinces to enshrine in their law what they deem to be a day off.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: In order for me to educate myself, why is July 1st a holiday in all provinces, then?

Mr. Colin Fraser: I didn't look into what the provinces have listed as their statutory holidays, but I assume that in each province they have passed it as a statutory holiday. If I'm wrong on that, I stand to be corrected. The provinces have the constitutional jurisdiction to regulate days off for regular working folks, schools, and all of that. That's in their jurisdiction.

I assume July 1 is considered a statutory holiday because at some point a law was passed in each province deeming it so. Four provinces don't have Victoria Day, and two don't have Remembrance Day. There are two that do it differently.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: To bring it back to basics, we just want the same definition of a "legal holiday" for these three distinct events, Victoria Day, July 1.... It's just the same wording, and the application remains variable province to province. That's your point.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Exactly.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you.

As it's the chairman's prerogative, Mr. Fraser, I have a quick question.

Have you had any businesses praise or have concerns about your bill?

Mr. Colin Fraser: I've had businesses only praise the bill, thinking along the lines of any Canadian that it's important that we appropriately mark Remembrance Day. If we can elevate the status or raise the profile of it, it's a good thing. I've had no negative comments with regard to it costing businesses more, because of course my bill doesn't affect days off.

If other provinces decide to look at that again, I'm sure there will be lots to say from the small business community, and I understand that debate has to play out.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): I agree with your first comment in your opening comments today that the respect that we have in Canada didn't happen by accident, didn't happen by luck, I think you said, and these things take some time to work through. There's no one here today who I've heard who has any dispute about respect for our veterans.

Mr. Samson, you have a final comment.

• (1630)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes. There's consistency, but there's also leadership. How does a government define that Canada Day is less important than Remembrance Day? That's a statutory holiday.

What's the reasoning behind it? I think having it consistent is saying that the federal government is viewing those three holidays as being extremely important in Canada. Let the provinces do what they choose with them, but as a Canadian government, we're being consistent in saying those three days are extremely important to us as a country.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Fraser, for your presentation today. Our time is up. We'll take a quick break while we change witnesses.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Thank you very much, everyone. I appreciate it.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you.

• (1630)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1635)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): We're going to bring things to order here, folks.

I mentioned earlier that we have couple of minutes of in-house business to do, committee business, at the end of the meeting that I'll be calling you in camera for. It'll take a few minutes.

I want to give Mr. White due time for his presentation. The questions that we've had have been very good.

I want to welcome Mr. White here today as the Dominion secretary for Dominion command of the Royal Canadian Legion.

I will give you the lay of the land here as well. We'll give you 10 minutes for your presentation. The first round of questions will be seven minutes, including the answers, and then we'll go to five minutes for as long as we have after that. We'll try to wrap up around 5:20 p.m.

With that, I will turn it over to you, Mr. White, for your presentation. Thank you.

Mr. Brad White (Dominion Secretary, Dominion Command, Royal Canadian Legion): Honourable vice-chair and members of the committee, good afternoon and thank you very much for inviting the Royal Canadian Legion to appear before the committee to speak on Bill C-311, an act to amend the Holidays Act, regarding Remembrance Day.

On behalf of our president David Flannigan and our 275,000 members, I'm expressing my pleasure at being here. As explained, I'm Brad White, the Dominion secretary of the Royal Canadian Legion. For the past 20 years, I have been involved in every major commemorative activity that the Legion has participated in, as well as being the former director of Canada's national Remembrance Day ceremony.

The Legion's position is that November 11 not be a legal or a statutory holiday, and therefore I will be speaking against Bill C-311.

I'd like to give you a little background information. Such positions and other matters of Legion policy result from resolutions passed at a Dominion convention following consultation and debate at all three levels of our organization.

This procedure for enacting change in the Legion starts at the branch level, where any member can propose a change in policy or administrative procedure that could affect the entire organization. Following a review and discussion by all members within the branch, the resolution passes to the provincial command level. At the provincial command level and at their convention the delegates from within that jurisdiction further consider and discuss the proposed resolution. If the delegates concur, the resolution is submitted to the Dominion command at the national level for our national convention, and this is the third and final level of consultation and debate. If passed by the Dominion convention, which is attended by delegates from all branches, all provincial commands in the organization, the resolution becomes an adopted policy or approved procedure within the Royal Canadian Legion.

As you can see, such matters receive thorough consideration and undergo debate throughout all levels of the organization.

The holiday status of Remembrance Day has been debated at numerous Dominion conventions throughout the Legion's history, in fact, 15 times since 1970 and most recently at our 2016 Dominion convention. At this Dominion convention the Legion's position against Remembrance Day being a statutory holiday was reaffirmed. We remain concerned that Canadians, given time off as a legal holiday, may not take the time to remember and that it may simply become a mid-week break or just another part of a long weekend.

The latter situation relates specifically to the discussion of the 1978 Dominion convention, which focused on how government departments of the day treated November 11 as a floating holiday to give their employees a long weekend. This must never be allowed to happen again.

We have heard an interpretation of what a legal holiday is and that making Remembrance Day a legal holiday would not designate it as a statutory holiday. The semantics of such interpretations are subjective. One needs only to look at the news media reporting on the progress of previous bills on this matter to see how it is a commonplace position that statutory holiday status is exactly what this bill would achieve.

The perception is further validated by association as the bill would serve to designate Remembrance Day the same as Canada Day and Victoria Day, both of which are legal holidays in the Holidays Act with each also being a statutory holiday. If it is not the intent of this bill to make Remembrance Day a statutory holiday, if designating it as a legal holiday only would not change its current status according to the interpretation provided by the Library of Parliament and reported to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, then why would we propose such a current bill?

Perhaps what is needed is to raise the awareness and understanding of Remembrance Day, which could be achieved through an educational strategy. It is paramount that the significance of Remembrance Day be instilled in our youth and the general population to show their respect for the sacrifices of our fallen. To honour this day, many schools hold assemblies, which they organize within their own commemoration programs. Some teachers take students to collectively participate with their peers in ceremonies at local cenotaphs, thereby strengthening the impact and the significance of the 11th of November.

The Legion works very closely with schools throughout the country to provide an educational component about Remembrance Day in addition to welcoming classes at ceremonies. The Legion's teaching guide is an excellent educational tool which has been viewed or downloaded from our website more than one million times.

● (1640)

The Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations expressed strong support for the Legion's position on Remembrance Day. The association noted in the 1960s that Ontarians did observe Remembrance Day as a school holiday. Children remained at home to play, watch television, and enjoy a day of rest. Few were involved in events recognizing the significance of the day. At that time, veterans' groups, school boards, and other organizations, such as the OFHSA, petitioned to have schools remain open on Remembrance Day so that suitable remembrance services could be held in schools to provide students with a better understanding of the purpose and the tribute paid.

As well, last June, when we made a presentation to this very committee, we had Madam Sonia Gallo, from the York Catholic School Board, appear alongside us at the committee meeting on Bill C-597; and she again supported the Legion's position.

So, too, are we encouraged to hear of organized commemorations taking place in workplaces on November 11. We need to make honouring and remembering an important part of our regular routine on November 11, and not simply provide a day off from school or work.

As an example, take Victoria Day, a legal holiday, and question what observances are being held across the country to honour Queen Victoria who, until last year, was Canada's longest-serving monarch. For most, it simply provides a long weekend in May. We should not let Remembrance Day follow the same fate.

We thank you again for this opportunity for the Legion to express our views, and again our organization opposes Bill C-311.

Thank you, Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you very much, Mr. White, for your clarity and your presentation.

I will turn this over to Mr. Samson to start the question period.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

Thank you for coming today. We always appreciate having the Legion and Legion members speak to us and share some important feedback on various issues, not just today's issue.

You said you did consult. Obviously, it's not unanimous because it's been discussed on a number of occasions; I think you said 15 times since 1970. Obviously, there are a fairly important number of members who believe that maybe we should look at it differently. That being said, it's not the majority today.

Can you help me understand what question is being asked of the members? Are we simply asking them, "Do you want Remembrance Day to be a holiday?" Do you explain what it means? What is the question you're actually asking your members that allows you to conclude that they don't want...?

Mr. Brad White: It's actually, as I explained in the presentation, our members who are raising the question to us. We don't pose the questions to them. They raise it from the branch level up. In the construct of the resolution, there are many paragraphs within that resolution that explain the bottom line, which would be their proposition. Their proposition, on the bottom line, would be to make Remembrance Day a statutory holiday. They will go through the many paragraphs that precede that proposition and explain what their position is. That's how the resolution process is done.

As it goes from the branch level up into the command level, the provincial command, it's debated there. Provincial command would then, if accepted, take that resolution up to us at the national level. At the national level we have delegates from all over the country representing all of the Legion branches if they send a delegate to the convention. Again, it's a very democratic process. The actual resolution is debated on the floor of the convention and a vote is taken whether to support or go against the resolution. In every case so far, they have not supported the actual resolution.

•(1645)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Do they realize this change that we're speaking of here, which is simply changing the words to "legal", is not actually making any changes in their provinces and territories? Do they realize this is not a change?

Mr. Brad White: While they may realize that, the position of the Legion is that we want kids to be in school. We don't want them out of school. Having served for 23 years here in Ottawa, I did many Remembrance Day assemblies at my kids' school where I was a member of the military. I came in uniform, medalled up, and away we went. We explained the significance of Remembrance Day.

Where you capture the kids is in a school assembly. The school assembly where I was had about 600 kids, and you had them all there and you discussed basically what Remembrance Day was all about. What we want is to capture those kids in school, not to have them out of school.

Mr. Darrell Samson: But this doesn't add to or subtract from that. This doesn't do that at all. Let me share with you, as a former superintendent of schools, what you're describing is happening in every school in Nova Scotia the week running into the 11th.

Mr. Brad White: That's correct.

Mr. Darrell Samson: In small communities, not a lot of people can go to the various schools. Throughout the week, they can plan on being in, speaking at, and supporting a larger number of schools than on that one day, on which they would be out at a cenotaph and not necessarily in school. Really what's happening now in Nova Scotia, in my opinion, ensures that students are well aware of

Remembrance Day and the importance behind Remembrance Day. You asked—and this is only my opinion—if it doesn't change the status, why do it? I say, if it doesn't change the status, why not do it? We're bringing consistency at the federal level.

Mr. Brad White: You mentioned the fact that, across Canada, some organizations will have a Remembrance Sunday, or a Remembrance Day that may not be celebrated on November 11. The Legion was very instrumental in making sure that November 11 was a day that we observe nationally, the day of remembrance. Before, and in some countries still today, they have Remembrance Sundays, or Remembrance other days, but those may not fall on November 11.

For us, it's of very big significance. The 11th of the 11th of the 11th is very significant in teaching young kids that they should be remembering the sacrifices that allow them to be in the school the way they are today.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It is for me too.

Mr. Brad White: I agree.

Mr. Darrell Samson: But it is still happening, in my opinion.

My last point is that I, as a family person, view holidays as an opportunity for a gathering of family so that you can spend time talking about family issues. The most important thing that usually comes out at the table is what we are celebrating that day or that week, and why we have a holiday. That's always been a discussion, so for me, it would be a little different.

Thank you very much for your comments.

Mr. Brad White: Thank you. I'm a military man with a military family. When my kids were in school, that's where I was—with my kids, at school.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you, Mr. Samson.

We'll turn to Mr. Brassard for seven minutes.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, welcome, Mr. White, to committee.

I'm fortunate that I have two Legions, one directly in my riding, the Lefroy-Belle Ewart Legion, which is a smaller Legion, but no less effective in dealing with issues of veterans, and of course, the Barrie Legion, which is a much bigger Legion. I've had the opportunity to be at both and to help celebrate Remembrance Day services, among other occasions, as well.

I want to thank you for the work that you do, that the Legion does, across the country. In my role as critic for veterans affairs, I've had the opportunity to go out and deal with several Legions. It's just amazing to me the support that your organization gives to veterans. I want to personally thank you for that.

You've been dealing with this issue for a long time. It sounds to me as though there's a real concern that we may move from the legal to the statutory aspect of the holidays. I'm going to give you an opportunity to expand on that, based on either previous testimony you've given or how your membership feels about that.

Mr. Brad White: I guess our primary concern—and we've experienced this here in Ottawa as well at the national Remembrance Day ceremony—is with stores downtown opening up. We've come to a deal with the stores downtown, the business association in the city, and city council as well, to make sure no stores will open until after, I think, 12 o'clock in the city, because of the observance of Remembrance Day ceremonies. We feel that making things statutory holidays is going to whittle away the real significance of the day and people taking that time to remember.

I go back to when we reinstated the two-minute wave of silence across the country. We started in St. John's, Newfoundland. In days gone by, there was always two minutes of silence, but because of our time-crunch society, we went to one minute. Quite a few years ago, we went back to the two minutes of silence. We started in St. John's, Newfoundland, and we rolled it out across the country, through all the provincial capitals. People would again become aware of the significance of remembrance.

We've just spent 10 years in Afghanistan with 158 casualties, so it's more relevant today to younger Canadians than it ever has been in the past. When I stood on parade, I always thought about my grandfather's generation. My father was standing by for the Korean War. To me, those were veterans. Today, it's a younger generation, and there's a whole new resurgence of remembrance that's come up because it is younger Canadians now. Bringing people home along the Highway of Heroes has also had an impact on Canadians. We send people across and overseas to do our various biddings, and we have to pay tribute to them. We have to bring them home that way.

• (1650)

Mr. John Brassard: You testified in front of the committee last year. The latest convention, I believe you said, was held in 2016, where you reaffirmed this. Since Bill C-311 has been introduced, have you heard from any of your members, from any of the Legions, with respect to this proposed legislation?

Mr. Brad White: No, we have not.

Mr. John Brassard: Okay.

Finally, we're always looking at ways to improve things for our veterans. I'm going to give you an opportunity now to speak to that. In the short time we have—so you need to be succinct in your answer—what do we need to do to help our veterans?

Mr. Brad White: I didn't think this was ACVA.

Mr. John Brassard: That's okay.

Mr. Brad White: That's okay...?

Mr. John Brassard: I can ask whatever I want.

Mr. Brad White: Particularly for this committee, I would say that if you talk to veterans, you'll hear that they want recognition. How do we recognize their efforts when we send them overseas? How do we recognize their sacrifices? There are things such as an Afghanistan memorial that's being debated, I think, at this stage in the game.

You can talk to a younger veteran—certainly not me—but somebody who has been in Afghanistan recently. First off, they don't consider themselves to be veterans, because veterans are that generation.... When you say to them that they've done their service and they're out of the military now, and you ask them what they

would like to have happen, they say, “We just want to be recognized for our sacrifices and for the duty we did.”

That's all it is. It's the recognition, whether it be a public or a private recognition. They do get a medal for their service in a combat theatre, but it's about that public recognition and the acceptance of the fact that they went there and did a job that not many Canadians volunteered to do. That's really what they want: recognition.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Mr. White.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you, Mr. Brassard.

Now we'll go to Mr. Nantel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. White. You were in the room when I brought up—

[*English*]

Do you understand French?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brad White: Just a little. My spouse and children are Quebecers.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: So you understand French very well. Perfect.

I'm fully aware of the importance of this. Observing a minute of silence or periods of 11 seconds of silence throughout isn't too much to ask, and is feasible.

My question isn't for you, but for our analysts. Is the translation of the paragraph from English into French optimal? I don't want to put you on the spot, but that's what I'm doing anyway. I'm sorry.

It constantly fascinates me. We voted on the motion earlier. We changed the wording in French because it wasn't correct. The wording the Conservatives used wasn't at all the same in French as in English.

It's very different for the bill we're studying. I'm not bilingual enough to see exactly what the difference is between “kept and observed” and “célébré”. When I see the word “célébration”, I think of Loto-Québec and balloons. It adds a festive aspect to the thing.

Here's what I think your main motivation is. You want this to be a time when people become aware of the sacrifices that have been made in the course of history. You don't want people to go out and drink beer in a park and sit around. I understand that. I don't know how we can word all of this.

Maybe I'm dreaming in technicolour, or maybe I'm coming at it with a sledgehammer, but I would take away the aspect of the holiday that is mentioned when it says "November 11 falls on a Saturday or a Sunday" because it looks like an extended weekend. If I were you, I wouldn't include that sentence. Ideally, you want schools to be involved. I think that's what the veterans want. You want the younger generations and the whole population to be aware of this.

It would be desirable for November 11 to fall on a weekday, so that children are at school, but if it falls on the weekend, it would be okay too. This may not be the case next year. Perhaps we can live with this more easily.

Your concern is to keep things as simple as possible. I suggest that the proposed subclause 3(2) be removed from the bill. Subclause 3(3) provides for the Canadian flag at half-mast on the Peace Tower. That seems manageable. Probably for stylistic reasons, the wording of proposed subclause 3(1) is reversed from the English version.

Mr. White, I'm coming back to you because surely you are more bilingual than I am. Is there a difference in intention between the words "célébré" and "kept and observed"?

•(1655)

Mr. Brad White: If I may, I would like to clarify that the appropriate word for us is "commémorer".

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Instead of "célébrer"?

Mr. Brad White: Yes.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Suppose we agree on an amendment and go with the word "commémorer". I assume you'd be more comfortable with that. You asked earlier why it was useful to clarify this aspect. The answer is that we would stop talking about it and take action. It would be nice if things were done and we moved on.

So if the word "commémorer" replaces the word "célébrer", if point 2 is removed, if we agree that there won't be a de facto holiday

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): We're having trouble with our translation here.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: The main issue is that if we switch "celebrate" to "commemorate" in the French aspect, if we skip number two, and if we agree that there is no statutory holiday to come with that legal status, would you be inclined to see a different thing, or do you just not want...?

Mr. Brad White: I have to give my impression from the policy that we have, and that would be no. We would not be inclined to accept that terminology, because we don't want it to be seen as a holiday. We want it to be seen as a special day when the country remembers.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: What makes it seen as a holiday?

Mr. Brad White: We don't want Remembrance Day labelled as a holiday.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: But as a—

Mr. Brad White: As a special day of remembrance.... We believe it's a day when every Canadian should take the time to remember, not look at it as just another holiday.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: So the issue is not about "legal".

Mr. Brad White: The issue is not about "legal"; the issue is about the whole implication of what this bill would mean to us.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: If it's not about "legal"...because in French it says that they want to switch from

[Translation]

"holiday" by "legal holiday".

[English]

You want "day" and not "fête".

[Translation]

You want to say day of commemoration—

•(1700)

Mr. Brad White: We don't want any mention of the word—

Mr. Pierre Nantel: You don't want the word "fête" to be used.

Mr. Brad White: Right.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Okay. We're making progress.

Can we agree on changing the wording?

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): We're on a short time to do that.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: If we want to get through this, let's find a way. Let's work this out and make sure that we do pay tribute to the sacrifice.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Just a quick answer...

Mr. Brad White: A quick answer from me would be that any bill that says Remembrance Day is a special day of Canadians for remembrance is fine by me. Just don't make it a holiday or a statutory holiday.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: So to stay out of this commentary and move into "what do we do", would...?

Mr. Brad White: Recognizing to Canadians that it is a significant day in the life of the country, a day when we should commemorate the actions of the fallen and those who go to serve on our behalf.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I'm sure this is the spirit of this bill.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Mr. Nantel, I'm going to have to interrupt you. We may get a chance to come back to you.

I'll turn it over to Mr. O'Regan.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. White.

I want to clarify something. You said that you don't want it to be a statutory holiday, but it has been a statutory holiday my whole life in Newfoundland.

Mr. Brad White: Some provinces do have it as a holiday, but for us it's not. We don't recognize it as a holiday.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: How does your membership in Newfoundland feel about that?

Mr. Brad White: I couldn't give you that poll because I'm not... you know, they're a block on the floor. Some probably support it, and some probably don't. That's the nicety of a democratic organization, to be able to debate these issues.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: Absolutely. As you probably know, we in fact have two holidays, because we've commemorated, I guess you could say—or celebrated, in some ways—Memorial Day since July 1, 1917.

Mr. Brad White: Absolutely.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: It commemorates the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel.

Mr. Brad White: Yes, it does.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: We've expanded it to commemorate the sacrifices of Newfoundland and Labrador since 1916, including that of my great-great uncle who fought in Gallipoli and in Beaumont-Hamel. He died in Beaumont-Hamel.

We have the two, and Remembrance Day has always been a statutory holiday for us. Memorial Day was brought in, and it's been a dual holiday with Canada Day since Newfoundland joined Canada in 1949.

I understand the Legion's wish that kids be in school on Remembrance Day. When Remembrance Day fell on a school week when I was a kid—and for my family now—we didn't go to school. We spend an inordinate amount of time, as you mentioned, preparing for it, and not just the week beforehand, but it seemed to be the weeks beforehand. We knew it was coming up as children, and certainly the impression upon us was that this day was so highly regarded that we had the day off school. Most of us considered it quite solemn, even though you might run out periodically. Yes, you're a kid, and you enjoy the day. The solemn nature of that day is understood, and the fact that it was a statutory holiday—and as far as I know will continue to be in Newfoundland regardless of this—was very important to us.

I guess that's subjective reasoning as well, whether it should be or it shouldn't be.

I want to be clear, because this is very important for me. I understand that you talk of national, but this is provincial. Again, we've had this for a long time and I know it means a great deal to people in my province. It's all I've ever known.

Is it the wish then ultimately, beyond this legislation, but looking at the stated goal of the Legion, that those provinces that have a statutory holiday presently should not have a statutory holiday? It should not be a holiday, but a day of commemoration, as you said?

Mr. Brad White: I don't think it's our wish to change provincial legislation at this stage of the game. I don't think it would be ever our wish to change that legislation. We just don't want to see this as a federal national holiday, and that's what it is, or a statutory holiday at the federal level.

I grew up in military schools. I grew up in schools on bases across the country. I remember doing the same thing that you did in school, building up towards Remembrance Day and then having the school assembly because we were in school.

• (1705)

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: Absolutely.

Mr. Brad White: And then participating in that assembly.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: I went to high school at CFB Goose Bay and did exactly the same thing.

What were you going to say, Mr. Samson?

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'm just saying that it's already a statutory holiday federally. You're saying you don't want it to be, but it's already that and this doesn't change that.

Mr. Brad White: We just don't recognize it, that's all. That's what our members want us to say.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes, because—

Mr. Brad White: Our firm belief, and it always has been, is that we get the kids in school. When we have Sonia Gallo from the York Catholic District School Board, one of the largest school boards in Toronto with over 55,000 kids.... I mean, she appeared with us doing the same thing. We want the kids in the school because we can make it a really special day for them in the school.

I agree. This year November 11 is going to occur on a Saturday, so what's going to happen? The kids won't be in school because it's the weekend. What do you do? Do you make it a long weekend and give them Monday off because the Saturday was the holiday? I'm not sure. There are so many permutations on it.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: For many of us, it was the days preceding the day.

You had the democratic debate among your members, and as you said, it comes from the ground up, which is great. However, are the limitations of what Mr. Fraser is proposing understood, that it's not going to change?

Mr. Brad White: No, I don't think it is, because this bill didn't come until after our convention in 2016. Our members have not pronounced anything on this bill. It's our general policy that they would go against making November 11 a holiday.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: Okay.

I'm fine, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you, Mr. O'Regan.

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

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. White.

You've been pretty crystal clear—really clear. It must be frustrating, though, to deal with this at your level 15 times in under 50 years. Somebody's trumpeting.... You know, sooner or later, they will eventually pass, right? You've been fighting this since 1970 in the Legion, for God's sake.

Mr. Brad White: Yes.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: When can this quit in your Dominion command, that you quit bringing this forward every four or five years because there's a special interest group?

Mr. Brad White: Have you ever been to a Legion convention?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: No.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kevin Waugh: So it will never end.

Mr. Brad White: This will never stop.

This is healthy debate, because it reaffirms the significance of what the day is supposed to mean for people. Any knowledge or reaffirmation of that significance, to us, is beneficial. The debate will never be over. We debate all sorts of things. This is one of our more colourful debates, I would say, because we do have one side versus the other. Sometimes it comes up to a standing vote, where you have 1,200 people and you have to count them on a convention floor.

But it is a healthy debate for an organization whose second mission is the preservation of remembrance. It's a healthy debate for our members to have. I welcome it. I'm not afraid of the debate, and our elected officers aren't afraid of the debate either. It's a good debate.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: This is the seventh time it's come forward in the House of Commons.

Mr. Brad White: Yes, and I think every time we've said, "no".

Mr. Kevin Waugh: That's all I have to say. You've been pretty crystal clear, so thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you, Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you very much for your presentation. You've been very clear.

Basically, you're concerned that this is the thin edge of the wedge, that if it gets approved, then next it will be a national holiday. As I've said to Mr. Fraser, growing up in St. Boniface, Winnipeg, in Manitoba, it has been a holiday for all of my memory. If Remembrance Day falls on a Saturday, then it's either going to be Monday or Friday that is a holiday, likely Monday. It's celebrated in a pretty passionate form in Winnipeg, with a lot of youngsters, boys and girls.

In terms of my question, I have little idea of how Legions are organized across the country. Do you represent Legions from all over Canada?

Mr. Brad White: I am the executive director at the national level, so I run our national headquarters on behalf of the elected officers. Within the organization, if you want to take an inverse military relationship, branches are on top, and they decide how our policy is

going to happen down at the bottom, at my level, at the national level.

We have over 1,440 branches across the country, in the States, with one in Mexico and one in Europe as well. In the country we have 10 provincial commands, as we call them, and they're paired with the territories as well. We have B.C.-Yukon, Alberta-Northwest Territories, and we have Nova Scotia-Nunavut. Those commands represent, within their areas of responsibility, the branches they have.

There are just over 275,000 members in the organization now, not all military. The majority of our members are actually military families—people who have the fathers or the uncles who have served in the military. We call ourselves a military family by and large.

When those branches operate, they respond to their provincial level, and then the provincial presidents form part of our national executive council. The council sits twice a year, in between conventions, which happen every two years. The council is really the governing body in between conventions, with the convention being our overarching governing body when it meets every two years.

That's the structure of the organization.

• (1710)

Mr. Dan Vandal: There's no other parallel organization that's national in scope. Is your organization the one?

Mr. Brad White: I would say that we are the largest support organization for veterans and the community in the country. Last year we gave out \$17.5 million to veterans who needed assistance, and that's directly from the poppy funds that we raise from the end of October through to November 11.

Mr. Dan Vandal: You're the largest, so does that mean there are some other national organizations?

Mr. Brad White: There are other national veterans organizations, but not on the scale of the Legion.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Okay.

Mr. Brad White: I like to say that the Legion walks its talk. We support veterans on the ground.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I think I'm good, unless there are any...?

Mr. Darrell Samson: If you would allow me, as Mr. Brassard said, I have six Legions in my riding. I believe the one in Sackville is the biggest one in Atlantic Canada. The work you do, the work the Legions do, to support veterans and military families is outstanding.

Mr. Brad White: Thank you.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I want to fully praise that.

What I've learned in the last year and half about how veterans help veterans is amazing. They are a support group that goes well beyond, right across the country.

Mr. Brad White: They are very much.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It doesn't matter where they are. It's something very special. I can say that in the last year and half I have spent a lot of time with many veterans and military families in Legions. The education has been a very enriching opportunity for me.

Thank you for the continued work that you do.

Mr. Brad White: Thank you, sir.

Are you a member?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes. I had no choice.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Darrell Samson: I was told I should be.

No, I have been for a long time.

Mr. Brad White: Good.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you.

I'm just wondering if Mr. Nantel had any questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: No, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): I think our questions have come to an end. If anyone else has anything to ask, now's the opportunity.

Thank you very much, Mr. White. On behalf of the committee, I really appreciate your presentation today. Your direct answers to the questions have been very informative. It's a big help to our committee.

Mr. Brad White: Thank you, sir.

Good luck with the discussion.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Larry Maguire): Thank you.

We'll just take a break for a minute or two. We'll call the committee back into session in a few minutes.

For anyone who's not on the committee, we'll ask you to take this opportunity to leave the room.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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