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## **Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Monday, March 21, 2011**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger**



## Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

Monday, March 21, 2011

•(1600)

[*English*]

**The Chair (Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC)):** I call the meeting to order.

Welcome, everyone, to meeting number 43 of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. Pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), under supplementary estimates (C) 2010-11, votes 1c and 5c under Veterans Affairs were referred to the committee on Tuesday, February 8, 2011.

Appearing before us this afternoon is the Honourable Jean-Pierre Blackburn, Minister of Veterans Affairs. From the Department of Veterans Affairs, we have with us Keith Hillier, assistant deputy minister, service delivery; Mary Chaput, associate deputy minister; and André Joannette, director general, finance division.

Welcome.

Mr. Minister, would you like to start, please?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, fellow parliamentarians and all of you here today, ladies and gentlemen.

I am pleased to appear before the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to present the budgetary estimates for my department, Veterans Affairs Canada, for the last fiscal year and the upcoming one.

But before I get into the numbers, I would first like to thank the members of the committee for their work on Bill C-55. Thanks to your understanding and compassion, we have been able to move quickly towards the passage of this meaningful bill in the House of Commons. I thank you and Canada's veterans thank you.

Allow me to digress for a moment. We wanted to fast-track this bill through the Senate. But it seems that the Liberal senators would not let that happen, I have just learned. I am not sure whether you can intervene to help us at all, but we all know how important it is that we vote on the bill as soon as possible. There is talk of a vote of non-confidence in the government on Friday. At least we will have done everything we could on our end.

Once the bill known as the Enhanced New Veterans Charter Act has received royal assent, it will give our most seriously injured soldiers broader access to better financial support as they transition to civilian life. We can all agree that these changes are a step in the right direction.

As Veterans Ombudsman Guy Parent told the committee on March 1, this bill is a small but important step that should not be delayed to try to improve it at this stage. That work will continue as we go forward.

[*English*]

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Excuse me, Mr. Chair—

**The Chair:** Okay. Mr. Minister—

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Excuse me for interrupting. The minister is here to talk about the estimates, and talking about a Conservative-dominated Senate and saying that the Liberals are holding up Bill C-55 is, I think, totally out of line. It's out of line to be mentioning it. I suggest that it's probably not even true, because we have been very committed and have been on the record, and this committee put it through very quickly.

I really object to the minister going off what he should be talking about—the supplementary estimates, which is what he came here for—and making accusations, which at this particular moment I'm not going to be running over to the Senate to find out about, because I know it's a Conservative-dominated Senate and no longer a Liberal-dominated Senate.

•(1605)

**The Chair:** Do you have a point of order, Mr. Blaney?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** Mr. Chair, I would just like to follow up on what I said by adding one thing that was brought to my attention. We wanted to fast-track the bill to proceed directly to second reading. And we needed unanimous consent to do that, but the Liberal senators would not agree. That has delayed the process somewhat.

Just how much of an impact will that delay have on whether or not the bill is passed? I cannot say. That being said, if my information is incorrect, I would happily withdraw my remarks at any point, of course.

That work will continue as—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Excuse me; Mr. Blaney had an intervention.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaney.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** I want to say something regarding the point of order, Mr. Chair.

I find it inappropriate to interrupt the witness, who has come here to meet with us today. First of all, my colleague's comments are out of place. The Prime Minister impressed upon us the importance of getting Bill C-55 passed quickly. He put the situation into context.

I think the members of this committee should at least have the decency to listen to what the witness has to say. Afterwards, every member will have an opportunity to ask the minister questions.

Interrupting the witness while he is making his opening statement is uncalled for.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay. I—

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Mr. Chair, this is a televised debate. When this airs tomorrow and the next day, those comments will be interpreted as factual, and I don't believe that's what the minister came here to speak to us about. He came here to speak about the supplementary estimates, and I would ask that he focus his comments on that issue.

**The Chair:** I've taken everything into consideration; Mr. Minister, please carry on, but we are here to do the estimates.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** Mr. Chair, as far as these budget numbers go, it is important to understand that every action and decision made at the Department of Veterans Affairs is geared toward improving services and benefits for Canada's most deserving citizens.

The changing demographic profile of Canada's veterans, their changing needs and requirements, and our involvement in Afghanistan have all resulted in more modern-day veterans than we anticipated applying for and receiving benefits under the New Veterans Charter. We are also seeing situations where new medical conditions arise at a later date or where additional difficulties affect veterans. As a result, veterans who already receive a benefit are coming back to us for additional help.

I also want to point out that our efforts over the past year to improve the process of awarding disability benefits have contributed to this increased spending. As of the end of February 2011, the number of disability claims processed increased by 15% this year over last year. As a result, we've put \$72 million more in the hands of Canada's veterans.

We have also seen an increase in the uptake of the rehabilitation and career transition programs. The year after the New Veterans Charter was introduced, there were just over 1,100 veterans taking advantage of these programs. This year, there were over 3,800, and we are forecasting over 4,600 next year. That's a 22% increase. It is important to keep in mind that Canada's veterans and their families are the main beneficiaries of this spending growth.

Mr. Chair, you will also notice that we asked for an additional \$9.4 million to support the veterans independence program. This reflects the fact that Canada's veterans are still in good health. Our traditional war service veterans are living longer and healthier lives, so they are able to remain in their homes with the help of grounds keeping and housekeeping services. This means fewer of them are moving to long-term care facilities. Again, this is another indication that our programs are effective and being well-used by veterans.

In relation to the spending on the Agent Orange program, I made an announcement in Fredericton back in December that the program would be extended. Our government committed additional funding, some of which is reflected in the numbers you see for both this year and next year. Essentially, that allowed us to change the program's criteria. First, we removed a restriction on eligibility. That allowed more widows to apply for the ex-gratia payment. Second, we changed the date in terms of getting a diagnosis. Since the announcement, we have contacted nearly 1,300 individuals to obtain consent to review their file, and we actually have received a number of new applications as well. The bottom line is that as of March 11, 2011, we have approved payments for over 300 individuals.

Once again, these increases speak to a desire to improve the quality of life for Canada's veterans and their families. They also underline some of the fundamental changes made to how we conduct business at the department these days. We are making real progress in reducing the complexity of the processes and programs, overhauling service delivery, strengthening partnerships with the Department of National Defence and others, sustaining the New Veterans Charter, and adapting the department to the changing demographics of our veterans.

As I mentioned, productivity at Veterans Affairs is up by about 15%. We have increased our team of adjudicators, improved our business processes and introduced better monitoring. We are doing a better job of communicating with veterans, giving clearer direction as to the type of information we need in order to be able to move forward with an application.

● (1610)

We have also made certain investments in technology. These are minor investments for the moment, and of course we have to quicken our pace. We will do more on this front.

I must mention other important progress: between January 2010 and January 2011, we reduced the number of disability claims waiting to be adjudicated by 36%. We are processing disability applications faster. As of early this month, March 8, 78% of first applications were completed within 16 weeks. The result, of course, impacts our budget for the upcoming year.

For 2011-2012, we project spending \$3.5 billion, an increase of \$109.1 million in comparison to the previous main estimates, or 3.2% from the previous year. I wish to point out that expenses related to Bill C-55 will not be added to the budget as long as the law has not been enacted, but we have provided for the costs related to the program. Some projects have already been approved and there are several others to come.

And finally, Mr. Chair, I don't want to leave you with the impression that all we do is spend money at Veterans Affairs Canada. We are very cognizant of the tight fiscal environment in which our country finds itself. There are some decreases in next year's anticipated spending amounting to \$85 million. This is due to a decrease in the forecasted number of War Service Veterans who will receive benefits from the department. As such, some program spending has been adjusted downward.

As well, the Veterans Review and Appeal Board has been established as a separate entity under the Financial Administration Act, which means that the expenditure will no longer appear in the department's spending. These estimates represent an important commitment by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Government of Canada to invest significantly in the health and well-being of Canada's veterans and their families.

I have enjoyed travelling across the country these last few months and talking with our veterans and telling them about the service improvements taking place in their name. Their feedback and yours have been invaluable, as has been the advice from their advocates. I of course plan to continue that dialogue to ensure all of our programs and services are continuously adapted and adjusted to better fit the evolving needs of both our traditional and modern-day veterans and their families.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

• (1615)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Our first question is from Ms. Sgro.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Is it correct that the minister is here for one hour?

**The Chair:** That's correct.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Thank you.

Welcome, Mr. Blackburn. I'm glad that we finally have you here before the committee. You've been the minister for quite a while and, for a variety of reasons, this is your first chance to come before us, so I'm glad that you're here. Thank you for coming and attempting to address us and for hearing some of the issues that we hear on a day-to-day basis from veterans and their families when they come before us.

We certainly hear from our departmental officials, with their desire to make a difference, but we also hear from many about the inadequacies and the large percentage of our veterans who are not getting their needs met. Given the fact that we have a lot of men and women coming home from Afghanistan in the next short while, I would expect an increase in the budget. I know you also referred to the fact that there would be a decrease in other areas.

How are you planning to ensure that your department will be sensitive to the many needs of the men and women who are coming home? How are you going to monitor the refusal rate of so many veterans, who come to us here and express their frustration with the department because of not being able to get satisfactory services, experiencing far too much red tape, and so on?

Regulation change could have been done instead of Bill C-55 on some of these issues. Why did you not choose to go that route, and why did you instead introduce a bill that will require a lengthy time to make these changes?

[Translation]

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** Thank you for your comments and questions.

With regard to our veterans who are returning from Afghanistan, we have put in place a special team to process their files more quickly. For instance, decisions on rehabilitation programs are handed down within a two-week time frame. As for benefits they may obtain under the department's various programs, be it the disability benefit or others, we have also accelerated the process and we can respond to their applications within 16 weeks. People may wonder why it takes 16 weeks when it should be done within three or four. There are also all sorts of reasons for that. Previously the turnaround time was 24 weeks, it is now 16, and we are continuing to improve the process. However, in order to make a decision we need all of the relevant information, the medical information in particular. It is very important that our employees have all of the documents in hand so as to be able to make a decision. Often, some of the information comes from the Department of National Defence, in particular the files and other documents, and all of this takes time.

Allow me to tell you that we are really making progress, making improvements. In the coming days our frontline employees will have the power to make decisions. And so they will no longer have to refer the case to levels above them, which led to delay after delay. The whole process within the department is evolving in order to meet our veterans' needs more quickly.

In addition, I will not deny that our department has aged as our veterans have, veterans of the Second World War, the Korean War and our various peace missions. And then our modern-day veterans appeared. We were not prepared from this sudden culture change, and the change in the needs of our modern-day veterans. These are completely different needs, as compared to those of our older veterans. For instance, we were not prepared to process their files using the Internet, and we are still not able to do so. This is one of the changes we are making. We will see what answers tomorrow's budget will contain in this regard. We are truly undergoing a period of major change and we are taking that reality into account, and the needs of our military people.

I also want to point out that we are processing our modern-day veterans' files in light of the New Veterans Charter approved in 2005. This should be an evolving charter but in reality there were no changes made over four or four and half years. Why was this the case? The situation was not the same. When our modern-day veterans come back injured from Afghanistan, for instance after having had a leg amputated, they are still members of the armed forces and they remain there during two or three years on full salary. It is only after that period that they deal with us and that they really come under Veterans Affairs Canada. All of this reality caught up with us quickly over the past 18 months, and this has meant that we must now pick up our pace. This is what we are doing at this time. Bill C-55 has not yet been passed. For that reason, we will not be able to give our modern-day veterans all of the benefits we want to give them. All of the flaws that need to be corrected will not be as long as the bill has not become law. Moreover, there will be a six-month lag before the regulations come into effect.

I tried to give you some specific details to reply to your comments.

• (1620)

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Kirsty, go ahead.

**The Chair:** You have one minute, Ms. Duncan.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Minister, thank you for coming.

I think one of the most pressing issues is operational stress injuries. About 20% return with an OSI; we have no electronic health records, so we don't know the full extent of the problem. Very few psychiatrists have experience with PTSD, and it's difficult to get help for our vets.

I'm wondering what you will do, since I don't see anything in the budget, to help with PTSD and help our veterans get better.

[Translation]

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** These injuries, be they physical or psychological, are covered by our department. Both types of injuries are treated and veterans may benefit, for instance, from the lump sum payment, and the various services, etc. The number of clinics has doubled over the past two years. It went from 5 to 10. These are specialized clinics throughout the country that serve our veterans. Our approach has in fact led to certain results which I am going to set out for you. Veteran Affairs Canada comes to the assistance of 13,700 veterans who are suffering from mental health problems, and their families, and close to 3,500 of these veterans have been treated in our specialized clinics.

Of course, we are constantly looking for ways to better help our people. During the Second World War this illness probably existed as well, but we did not have a name for it. Now we call it operational post-traumatic stress syndrome. Science is always progressing and that is something we take into account within our department.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. André, please, for the next question.

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Good afternoon, Minister. We are pleased to have you with us today. I think this is the first time that you have appeared before this committee.

As you said, we have met with many veterans and several groups. I was surprised to hear you say that the services for veterans were moving forward, that you were improving the system and that you expected further achievements down the road.

We heard several witnesses: the president of the Royal 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment Association, Mr. Renaud; retired Colonel Pat Stogran, a former veterans' ombudsman whose contract you did not renew; Mr. Bruce Henwood, from the Special Needs Advisory Group; Mr. Victor Marshall, chair of the Gerontological Advisory Council; Mr. Sean Bruyey, a former member of the armed forces. Mr. Mark Campbell, a soldier who stepped on a bomb in June 2008, also appeared before another committee. The generally held opinion was that the New Veterans Charter deprives disabled veterans of 40% of their income.

According to several witnesses we heard here when we studied the New Veterans Charter, it seems undeniable that the abolition of the monthly pension in favour of a lump sum payment greatly penalizes a number of veterans.

We in fact saw certain statistics in this regard. A person with a 20% disability used to receive approximately \$600 to \$800 monthly. Now that person would receive approximately \$50,000.

If you were 21 or 22 years old, Mr. Blackburn, and you were given a choice between receiving \$600 to \$800 per month for life and receiving a sum of \$50,000, which would you choose?

How can you tell us that you are improving the situation for veterans when you are depriving these people of a large part of their potential income by abolishing this monthly lifetime benefit? You know very well that in Quebec, as well as in other provinces in Canada, petitions were circulated asking that the lump sum payment be abolished in favour of a return to a monthly lifetime pension.

There are young people who have accidents when they are 20 or 25 years old. If, as Bill C-55 provides, this lump sum payment of \$50,000 is divided into two or three payments, that only amounts to \$10,000 or \$15,000. It is not sufficient, it won't allow disabled persons to meet their needs for the rest of their life.

What happens in those cases?

Some mothers came here to tell us that it was often the family that then had to take on the costs related to a soldier's serious injury.

• (1625)

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** Allow me to provide you with some additional clarification on this.

Indeed, the New Veterans Charter was adopted in 2005 unanimously by the House of Commons. I think that everyone was acting in good faith and wanted to help our veterans.

We did say that this was a living charter. Afterwards, the problems with it began to emerge clearly. We met some of our military people who had come back injured, and some of them had mental health problems or post-traumatic stress syndrome and they had received lump sum payments, some of which were as much as \$276,000. Some of them told us that they had wasted their money and that they were not in a position to manage it well.

**Mr. Guy André:** It should be pointed out that \$276,000 is the maximum amount.

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** Indeed, the ceiling is \$276,000.

**Mr. Guy André:** That is the amount that is generally quoted, but for a 20% or 25% disability, people are given sums that are more in the order of \$50,000 to \$66,000.

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** That is why we took those aspects into consideration. We even did a study to see what people's satisfaction level was. Over 69% of people said they were happy with the lump sum payment. But 31% of people were unhappy. So we really started wondering and looking into why those people were unhappy. That is when we realized that many of them had mental health issues. That was one side of the problem, but there were others too.

The other problem we discovered was that people who were in the army, had a low salary, came back with an injury and wanted to be in a rehabilitation program would in fact receive 75% of their salary. But 75% of a low salary means an even lower salary. That was something that had to be corrected quickly, because some of those people had families to provide for. The rehabilitation program is the foundation for the new charter, whose purpose is not to keep 20-, 30- or 40-year-old injured soldiers waiting when they come back home. These soldiers have to be given the chance to rehabilitate themselves and return to civilian life. Their disabilities have to be taken into account to make sure that they can find another job, continue to thrive and be active members of society.

Our first change concerns the minimum amount that a person who comes back injured can receive while in rehabilitation, that is to say a minimum amount of \$40,000. If 75% of the salary is higher than \$40,000, the person will certainly be entitled to that amount. The minimum they can receive is \$40,000.

The second change has to do with the permanent monthly allowance, which is similar to the old pension system. The person would receive this amount every month for life for their disability. The amount goes from \$536 to \$1,609. The amounts have been indexed over the past few weeks, but I am providing you with the amounts that I had. The problem we were dealing with was that practically no one was eligible for that amount. Why? Because there was an error in the old charter. It wasn't taking into account injuries that had occurred before the new charter was in place. So we are going to correct the error in the legislation. As a result, 3,500 people will be eligible for this monthly amount for life. In addition to this amount, those who cannot return to work because they have experienced serious injuries will receive \$1,000 more a month. If we add all these amounts, the person who cannot return to work because of serious injuries will earn \$58,000 for life. And the lump sum payment is in addition to that amount.

I would like to remind the hon. member that, when you are in the army and come back physically injured, you receive a sum of up to \$250,000 from the military and a second sum of up to \$276,000 from us.

• (1630)

**Mr. Guy André:** And the \$276,000 is the maximum lump sum, Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** That's correct.

[English]

**The Chair:** Excuse me, but we do have to carry on; your seven minutes have passed.

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy André:** Mr. Minister, I would like to quickly add that all the organizations that have studied the bill are still saying that they want to revert to the monthly pension.

[English]

**The Chair:** We do have to move on to Mr. Stoffer.

You have five minutes, Mr. Stoffer.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. *Bienvenue*, Minister, and your staff. Thank you for coming.

Sir, you said that VRAB was now a distinct entity within your department. Personally, I'd like to see it extinct, to be completely frank with you, because I've yet to see the benefit of the doubt clause applied in any decision they've ever made on veterans, even though they're legislated on that. That's just a personal beef.

Second, you talked about the improvements to DVA, and yes, there are some. I've noticed improvements since 1997, as we go along. Still, in 2005 58 veterans used a Calgary food bank that's designated for just veterans, and 204 to 210 veterans used it in 2010. That's quadruple the number of veterans using a food bank in the richest city in Canada. I don't know how many other veterans are using food banks across the country, but we have a homeless situation for veterans and we have a food bank crisis for veterans. A country this rich, a country that can spend \$26 million on advertising for its programs for the general public, can surely to God help veterans who are using food banks. No veteran—in fact, no person—should ever have to use a food bank, especially our veterans.

My last question is on Agent Orange. I thank you and the department for changing that date of death—I believe it was the time you took office—from February 6, 2006, if I'm not mistaken, but if you had changed the criteria from 1966-1967, that would have helped thousands of more people, which, by the way, was a Conservative promise in 2005-2006.

Regardless of that, I have specific questions for you.

Today I got a call from several veterans, who told me quite clearly that they were informed that the benefits they receive.... There are various charts. You get 5%, 10%, 17%, 40%; depending on the disability you have, there's a certain chart determining what percentage of a benefit you receive. I'm going to ask if there has been any direction from you or your department to lower the award amounts to meet the budget you have. That's question number one. When a veteran calls in, he may be entitled to 20%, but he receives 17% in order for you to meet your budget criteria.

Second, you were quoted as saying that \$2 billion is going to be added to DVA. In fact, that was in a press thing this morning by Bryn Weese of Sun Media, which said that \$2 billion is here in the DVA; however, the estimates show an increase of \$109 million, so I was wondering if the \$2 billion is accurate. Also, for how many years are we talking about the additional \$2 billion?

Third, when the last Korean and World War II veteran dies, what will happen to the beds at the Perley, Camp Hill, Colonel Belcher, and Ste. Anne's hospitals? Right now we know that an awful lot of modern-day veterans have no access to those beds, so what happens to all those hospital beds and the long-term care facilities for our modern-day veterans when the last one dies?

I have many other questions for you, but I only get a few short minutes. I do thank you and your staff very much for coming.

[Translation]

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** Thank you for your questions, Mr. Stoffer. I will ask our officials to shed some light on this matter as well.

I have never ever asked that the amounts we were giving our veterans be lowered in order to save money. Let me ask our officials: have you heard anything like that from me?

[English]

**Mr. Keith Hillier (Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery, Department of Veterans Affairs):** I can respond to that one with a flat no. We have never done that. The payments for our veterans are statutory, and that's why we are here sometimes for supplementary estimates (A) and (B), or, as we are today, for supplementary estimates (C).

I've been with the department for 15 years, and there has never ever been any direction to reduce, lower, or do anything with benefits to meet any budgetary targets.

•(1635)

[Translation]

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** In terms of the \$2 billion—which is not, of course, in the budget, because the sum has not been approved yet by the House of Commons—the amount will be included if it is approved through a vote.

We are talking about \$200 million over five years. In the Minister of Finance's accounting, since he has to keep track of the total costs, there is a mention of the \$2 billion in the budget. That's what we should hear announced tomorrow.

You have probably also noticed that we want to do more to help our veterans. As a result, we are going to introduce a new measure

for veterans who want to return to civilian life or who can no longer be in the military because of injuries. This measure will allow them to offer their services in the construction sector.

That's being done in the United States, and a number of our soldiers have professional skills that could be used in construction. We will try to find a way to help them to work in this sector and, of course, we will consider other options.

As to the homeless situation, I went to Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal where we have established pilot projects. I think everyone was able to see that veterans who are homeless can usually be eligible for assistance from us.

However, the hard part is for us to find them. Once we find them, we will definitely examine their files and assess the services they can receive from us. I think we can easily come to the conclusion that a homeless person is someone with difficulties in life. So our department assesses the files.

I even had the opportunity to have dinner with a homeless person who told me his life story and how his black-out happened. This man decided one day to leave the army for all kinds of reasons and ended up on the streets. He told me that, while he was in the army—you will perhaps find this story interesting—he served as a model prisoner, which had an impact on his life later, after he left the military. One day, he was working with his hands, as he was a good carpenter, and his fingers came into contact with the saw. The blood spurted on his face and everything went black.

No one wanted to look after him, and his family abandoned him. So he went into the bush near Calgary. He told me he lived in a tent for two and a half years and he cried every day. He said he cried all the time.

One day, someone from our department found him and was able to take care of him. He has now recovered and is getting all the services from our department.

It was really remarkable hearing this story, which helped me to see this man's journey. We often wonder about PTSD and we don't think it can happen just like that. In his case, it was the accident that triggered it.

[English]

**The Chair:** We have to move on, Minister.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Mr. Chair, on a point of order, can we just get the answer on the hospitals? When the last World War II or Korean War veteran dies, what happens to those long-term beds?

**A voice:** Mr. Chair, he's way over time.



**The Chair:** We're way over time on this particular question. I'm quite sure you could make that request to the minister.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaney.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am very honoured to be replacing the parliamentary secretary and I thank my colleagues for having faith in me today.

I would first like to congratulate the minister for Bill C-55, which addresses many of the gaps you pointed out. I obviously think it is unfortunate, especially for our veterans, that the Liberal members of the Senate have not given their unanimous consent in order to move the bill forward as quickly as possible.

[*English*]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Mr. Chair, this is unfair comment. We work, as you know, in a non-partisan way. We passed Bill C-55 in one meeting, and I think it's unfair that members are using that opportunity to say things that aren't even true.

**The Chair:** All I can say is that we came to a—

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** It's just because you guys lie all the time.

**The Chair:** That's registered on television too, I'm quite sure.

Let's just settle down here for a minute and realize that we're at an estimates meeting. I think we've heard two or three times that we're not on Bill C-55, and all we've dealt with is Bill C-55.

Please ask some questions, Mr. Blaney, and please, let's talk about the estimates. I'm quite sure the estimates will also be impacted by Bill C-55. That is where we are, and we're going to go to questions, please. We will, as a committee, make mention to the Senate that maybe they can get Bill C-55 through quickly.

Could we have a question, please?

•(1640)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Chair, I applaud your remarks and I hope that my colleague's comments will not interfere with my time.

Mr. Minister, I would also like to thank you for February 23 visit to Lévis. You came to meet with veterans in my constituency, members from the Régiment de la Chaudière and from the 6<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment. They still tell me about it. They came to my office to see me. They were very proud and happy, especially about your open-mindedness and the fact that you agreed to answer questions after your presentation. That was greatly appreciated, and I thank you for that. This brings me to my first question.

Veterans have told me that, when they talk to employees in the department, they don't understand what the veterans have gone through. We often say that it takes a soldier to understand another soldier, especially in PTSD cases. I believe one of your priorities is to hire more military staff in the Department of Veterans Affairs. Could you first tell me about your efforts in this direction?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** I would like to thank the hon. member.

You are right to mention that. The fact that there are not enough veterans working for our department is another area that has been criticized. Having veterans among our employees in all sectors is an asset, since they truly understand the culture of the military and of our Canadian Forces. We have started the process of hiring more veterans, and we have just appointed two veterans to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. We have also hired Ms. Jaeger, a veteran—I don't have her exact former rank—...

[*English*]

**Ms. Mary Chaput (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Veterans Affairs):** The Surgeon General of DND, Dr. Hilary Jaeger, is with us now.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** She is now with our department. So you can see that we are really making changes that are beneficial for our department and our veterans. With these changes, our culture will also adapt to this reality.

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Minister, we had a chance to talk about this. It is important that all Canadians, including Quebeckers, recognize veterans' contribution to the country we have built. You have set up a program for building memorials and cenotaphs.

You were in Lévis on February 23 and in Sherbrooke the next day. Could you tell me a bit about this program? Is it still possible for groups to access this program?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** Until this year, we had a program for restoring cenotaphs. For a few months now, there has been a program for building new cenotaphs in honour of our veterans from various wars and our modern-day veterans, of course. This program gets \$5 million, or \$1 million per year over five years. That allows us to allocate up to \$50,000—the maximum we can grant—for building new monuments in honour of those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice, losing their lives to protect our country and our values.

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** Thank you.

There is also a program for elderly soldiers. So some WW2 veterans come to my office from time to time. It is a program like the VIP. Sometimes, it is more complicated for these people to fill out a form. They have a long medical history that spans decades. Could you tell me something about this program, please?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** First, if I may, I would like to say one thing about our program for the new cenotaphs.

I have just signed off on some of these applications over the past few weeks. One of our members, Dean Del Mastro, has recently announced the establishment of a wall of honour in Peterborough. The wall includes the names of 11,000 soldiers, sailors, air force personnel and merchant mariners from the area, all who came forward to serve in the two world wars and the Korean War. That's a concrete example. We gave them \$50,000 and their MP was able to make the announcement.

Sir, in terms of the veterans independence program, I'll be honest with you. We have received many requests to extend it. We have also received some criticism.

I am currently looking into what we should do with the program, since people appreciate it. For example, this program allows them to get funding for snow removal, home maintenance, cleaning or mowing the lawn.

The amounts per capita are not huge, but they are really appreciated. This money allows people to stay in their own homes longer rather than moving to a seniors residence.

We extended the program in 2008. We have invested \$282 million over three years in the VIP. As a result, more survivors and more widows were able to receive the help they needed to continue living independently at home.

Just recently, we have also told them that we are offering direct deposit for those...

• (1645)

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Please correct me if I am wrong, but my understanding is that it's five minutes for questions and answers.

**The Chair:** No; in the first round we have seven, seven, five, and seven.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** I extend my apologies to the minister.

**The Chair:** Now we're on five minutes. I am watching the time. We went over with Mr. Stoffer, and now we've used up another minute or two here.

**Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to remind the committee that it has been our tradition not to allow speakers to go over with their questions, but to allow witnesses to go over with their answers.

**The Chair:** Thank you, but sometimes people put 10 questions out, and....

**A voice:** Sometimes the ministers are here for two hours, rather than just one.

**The Chair:** Anyway, we have one hour. Now we've lost another minute or two.

I think, Mr. Blackburn, you were pretty well finished with your answer on the VIP.

We'll go to Ms. Duncan and Mr. Lamoureux for five minutes.

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I want to make sure that the point of order raised by Mr. Lamoureux was not taken under my watch. He interrupted the minister while he was providing his response to my question.

**The Chair:** There were about five seconds left.

Go ahead, Ms. Duncan.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Further to my earlier comments, I have been meeting with Veterans Affairs psychologists and psychiatrists across the country. I'd like you to hear some of the comments from our veterans: "We're all suffering. We need help. It's not only the guys we lose overseas; it's also the guys we lose here to suicide. They might as well have died overseas. We've all contemplated it. The thoughts are relentless". I don't see anything in the budget for PTSD.

That's from the medical doctors and the veterans. On the OTSSCs, a person may be followed by a psychiatrist and a psychologist and have one or two visits afterwards. They're discharged to no one. The JPSUs are very good, but they lack medical contacts. There's no medical transition. The vets are forced to look for family doctors, and many are not in shape to do so. There are far too few OSI centres. They have to go for assessment, and they often do not get follow-up. Veterans need regular follow-up with psychologists and psychiatrists where they are.

I'm also concerned because your department told me there has been only one study linking PTSD and dementia, but there are many. We're going to have one in five veterans coming back with PTSD, and for some it will be long-lasting. The dementia issue needs to be looked at, as well as acquired brain injury and its link with PTSD, but that's not being looked at.

The question I will ask is about Agent Orange and the Institute of Medicine. We're using 2004 information. The U.S. updates it every two years. I'm wondering if we're going to be doing the same.

• (1650)

[Translation]

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** Once again, I would like to specify that we have 10 clinics for those struggling with operational PTSD. We are currently helping more than 13,700 veterans with PTSD, and 3,500 veterans have been treated in our clinics. Our support is ongoing.

I didn't quite get your question about Agent Orange. Could you please repeat it?

[English]

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Absolutely, Minister.

Canadians are basing the information we have on illnesses, which are presumptive illnesses, on 2004 data. The Institute of Medicine in the United States updates that information every two years.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** Okay. I understand your question now.

I do not want to play partisan politics. The Agent Orange issue had been ongoing for a number of years. That being said, it was our government that decided to take action in order to address the situation of those affected by Agent Orange.

Initially, we invested money based on specific criteria. A few months ago, we realized that we had some money left over. We decided to expand our criteria so that widows could also benefit from the *ex gratia* payment of \$20,000.

I can tell you that last December 22, I was...

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Just a second. I'm sorry to interrupt, Minister, but we'd like to be able to ask another question, and—

**The Chair:** We'll consider the Agent Orange question answered, and Mr. Lamoureux—

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Whatever research you can provide to us would be definitely beneficial and much appreciated.

Given the limited amount of time that we actually have you here before committee, I have a very quick question. There are issues in regard to health care facilities where our vets are. There are homeless shelters. We had reference made to food banks. There are suicides. There's a general awareness within the stakeholders that the government is not doing enough to find out what issues are facing our vets. Minister, specifically what are you, as the minister, and the government doing to aggressively pursue the issues our vets are having to face, as opposed to relying on the vets to come to you? What are you doing to get to those vets?

**Ms. Mary Chaput:** Just for a little more clarity on our OSI clinics—operational stress injury clinics, where PTSD is treated—the operational spending in 2010-11 was in the order of \$18 million. In the current fiscal year, it's expected to be approximately \$21 million. What I'd like to reinforce is that this money is being spent on clinics. There is also research ongoing on the effects of mental health, mental injuries, brain injuries, spinal injuries, etc. on veterans' ability to remain in their homes.

I believe that early in March the committee met with Alain Beaudet, president of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. We in the department have met with Dr. Beaudet. We've talked about the research priorities of the institute and of those of this department to try to make sure we are leveraging and pushing research dollars towards those issues that are going to be very pertinent for veterans and the types of injuries or mental health issues they struggle with, so there is a large body of work ongoing. We're cognizant that there is much more to do and that this is a very important area. We think we could have a very rich collaboration with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

• (1655)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll have two more questioners. One will be Mr. McColeman, and then we'll finish with Mr. Vincent.

Mr. McColeman, go ahead.

**Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC):** Minister, thank you for being here today.

I've served on this committee since I came to Ottawa in 2008. I want to compliment you on the many things you've been able to carry forward for veterans in this country since you took over. We're hearing that things aren't perfect; they're never perfect, frankly, and there's lots of work to be done, but you, sir, have taken the ball, and you've done many good things over the time you've been the minister.

One of the insinuations here has been that you have not been on the ground and have not listened to vets. I'm aware of the tour you did—I believe it went across the country—to speak with vets and the Veterans Affairs staff on the ground who are serving the vets. You listened to them for some things you could take back to make improvements with. Could you expand on what that tour entailed?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** Yes, I had some very specific goals in mind for the tour across Canada.

I first wanted to meet with our staff, of course, everywhere we have an office in the regions we were visiting. I also wanted to meet with the organizations representing our veterans. Finally, I wanted to see the residences and shelters available to assist the homeless so that we could talk with stakeholders about their methods of identifying homeless people and see what kind of measures they were taking to support them.

Of course, I also went to military bases to tell our forces what we were hoping to achieve with Bill C-55. I noticed that people did not seem to have the right information. They were not aware of what was in the new charter or what would happen to them once they left the Canadian Forces, if they got to that point. They were not aware of the services they would get from our department. They were surprised to see all the services that we would provide them with and that we are currently improving to better serve their needs.

I would like to go back to the lump sum payment. With Bill C-55, we would be changing the lump sum payment so that they could either take a one-time payment or spread it over how many years they choose. That does not mean they would be making the right decision.

If you were in their shoes, what would you do? You would ask your spouse, your friends or your family what was best for you to do in your situation. Would it be better to take some of the money to buy a house? Or would it be better to spread it over time, as some of them have already received \$250,000 from the Department of National Defence? Those are the changes we are making, and they are a real improvement.

We would certainly like to give more. That's always the case. But we have been going in the order of priorities. We consulted with veterans' organizations. We asked them what changes were most urgent. And we established the priorities with them. They are backing us up as we speak. They are urging the government, the Senate and everyone else to pass this legislation in the coming days, since we don't know what looms ahead in the House of Commons.

These types of tours are really important. They allow us to reach people. People can then meet with me and share how things are.

Even in the House of Commons—I can ask the members—how many times have you come to me with an envelope, not a brown envelope...

**Voices:** Ha, ha!

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** How many times have you come to me with a white envelope with requests from veterans. They go through you to ask us to look at their files, don't they? I always make a point of examining the situation of any given person. Sometimes, we realize that there are things we can improve, and we do improve them.

[English]

**The Chair:** I think we'll move on to Mr. Vincent.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am not questioning your integrity at all, Mr. Minister. Mr. Hillier said earlier that veterans' allowances had never been reduced. I think he is somewhat mistaken and I am going to show you why.

Do you recall the last time you appeared before this committee? I had asked the department to draw a comparison between the veterans charter and the former Pension Act. The department came to the conclusion that, in two out of three cases, it was more beneficial for those whose disability rates varied between 2%, 3%, 4% and 40% to be subject to the old Pension Act than the New Veterans Charter. It was not me who said that; it was your department. It is written in black and white in the report. I hope you are aware of that. And now, you have just told us that the new charter is better for the veterans you have met with and that it will protect them. That's not true. In the report, your department said that that the old pension was better for those whose rate of disability was less than 40%.

Mr. Chair, it has also been said that the waiting list has been reduced by 36% in a year, but the fact remains that 64% of claims have not been processed. In addition, the minister is asking us for \$155.6 million to deal with the backlog of payments and disability pensions. Have you thought about the fact that 36% of applications have been processed, but people who were deployed in theatres of operation and came back injured have not been receiving any compensation? You have just started giving them benefits. You have just asked for new budgets. That makes no sense. Yet you talk about respect for veterans. Let me just say that we are nowhere near that.

In addition, we are talking about your tour. I am aware there was a tour because you came to my area. But if you have a tour to meet with veterans who are not going to benefit from the New Veterans Charter, we have a problem. What is the point of meeting with WW2 veterans who are receiving benefits under the Pension Act and have

no link with the New Veterans Charter? Even if you meet with them and talk to them across the country, that's not going to change anything in their lives, since they will never be subject to the New Veterans Charter. Those who will benefit from this new charter are our new soldiers, the ones in Afghanistan or the Blue Helmets who are going to be deployed as part of peacekeeping missions. These are the people that need to be protected, but the charter does not protect them. You can list all the amounts you want, but the fact remains that your department is telling us the opposite of what you are saying. For these people, the charter is not any better than the old act.

● (1700)

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** First of all, when we meet with our traditional veterans, they are in support of what we are doing for our modern-day veterans. They are not selfish.

**Mr. Robert Vincent:** Mr. Blackburn, they are not familiar with the legislation. You have not explained it to them properly.

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** First, they are soldiers or former soldiers, and they are able to tell whether the government is being fair to modern-day veterans.

Second, Mr. Chair, I did not just meet with representatives from veterans' organizations. I also went to military bases. I met with serving members who were able to appreciate what we are doing for them.

Third, let me explain the difference between the old and the new charter. Under the former charter, our department was providing 16 services whereas, under the new charter, we are offering 37. So there must surely be something better somewhere in there. At the moment, if you have a serious injury, you receive \$58,000 per year until the age of 65.

**Mr. Robert Vincent:** Mr. Blackburn, you know that, when the rate of disability is 40% or less, it is better to be subject to the Pension Act. And the majority of people returning from Afghanistan have a disability of 40% or less. That means you are making money at the expense of veterans who are injured. Mr. Minister, it is written in black and white in the document from the Department of Veterans Affairs that I requested so that I could understand the difference between the new act and the old one based on the disability rate. You should not be fooling people like that.

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn:** The new charter is built around rehabilitation. We want to make sure that people can return to work. And if they do go back to work, they will be able to earn a salary, continue to thrive and move forward with their lives. We want to make sure that the people who come back home will receive at least \$40,000 during their rehabilitation, and \$58,000 if they cannot go back to work, in addition to the lump sum and the \$250,000 from the Canadian Forces. And of course, we are still talking about a maximum amount depending on the extent of the injuries.

[English]

**The Chair:** We're already past the time.

I thank you, Mr. Minister and associates, for being here today. Thank you very much for answering the questions on the estimates.

We're going to take a short break—four or five minutes—and then there are a couple of things we have to pass.

•(1705) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

•(1705)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

There are three things we still have to accomplish here today.

First of all, we have to vote on the supplementary estimates (C). A quorum of seven is required, and we have that quorum.

We have two votes.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Before you do that, Mr. Chair, on a point of clarification, I just want to verify that the \$11.5 million for the Veterans Review and Appeal Board is not part of this vote. Am I correct?

**The Chair:** Yes. I'll let my analyst explain.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** They're now a separate agency, apparently.

**Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré (Committee Researcher):** The vote for the tribunal was passed on the main estimates for 2010-11, and there's a new \$11.5 million in the 2011-12 estimates, but now as a separate entity. It's not within the department's budget.

**The Chair:** Okay. Is everyone clear?

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ministry Summary

Vote 1c—Operating expenditures, upkeep of property, remedial work on property, certain Ministerial salaries.....\$19,787,717

Vote 5c—The grants listed in the Estimates and contributions, provided that the amount listed for any grant may be increased or decreased subject to the approval of the Treasury Board.....\$170,070,000

**The Chair:** Shall vote 1c carry?

(Vote 1c agreed to)

**The Chair:** Shall vote 5c carry?

(Vote 5c agreed to)

**The Chair:** Shall I report the supplementary estimates to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Yes.

•(1710)

**The Chair:** Second, this is a budget for witnesses for Bill C-55. The amount requested is \$4,400.00. That was for witness expenses; then we had a video conference, and there were miscellaneous expenses. It's \$4,400.00.

Can I have a motion to accept that budget?

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Mr. Chair, don't we usually do this budget in advance?

**The Chair:** Yes, but that didn't happen.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** I thought we hadn't noticed it happen.

**The Chair:** This is a catch-up we're doing because we didn't....

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** We are supposed to do it the other way.

**The Chair:** Yes, we understand that, but it was....

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** It was a bit rushed.

**The Chair:** It came very quickly.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** My goodness, we rushed it through.

**The Chair:** There we are.

Anyway, can I get a motion to accept?

Go ahead, Mr. McColeman.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** I would just like to know what the \$4,400.00 represents. It there a per diem for these people?

**The Chair:** No. It was witness expenses.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** How many were there—two people?

**The Chair:** Yes. It was for transportation for two witnesses.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** Were they from Quebec? Am I correct in reading that they're both from Quebec?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**A voice:** It's expensive.

**The Chair:** Okay. Those witnesses have been here.

Ms. Sgro has moved approval of the budget.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Third, our analyst will have a draft here on Wednesday for our study.

**Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré:** I cannot call it a draft, because it's not official. It's a draft executive summary of what could be a report, in case something happens and you want to go fast.

**The Chair:** Also, we're doing it ahead of time. There is one more witness left for next Monday, but it will give us something to look at. We can say it's looking good or we want it changed, and then we'll have to work hard.

Go ahead, Mr. Vincent.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Vincent:** I have one final question.

I remember that the last time we talked about this, there were no other witnesses left. We had reached the end of our list of witnesses and now we have another witness.

Who is this new witness scheduled for Monday? And what is happening on Wednesday?

[English]

**The Chair:** There's nothing on Thursday. It's on Wednesday. On Wednesday we're going to bring in somewhat of an update, a briefing, on the study we were doing. If we want to bring a report forward, it won't be a full report, because we have the one more witness, and the one more witness has been on the witness list right from the start. Our clerk, when we talked about it at least a month ago, said that we had someone booked for the 28th, and they've already been booked for the 28th. It's Dr. Ritchie. She used to be with the United States Army medical services.

Go ahead, Mr. Stoffer.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** I have a couple of items.

First, I wonder if the analyst can give us some more formal understanding in the future as to how VRAB became a separate agency. I'm not quite sure when or why that happened, but it would be interesting to know why the department did that.

Second, Mr. Chairman—and I say this with great respect—we can't have any more cancelled meetings. You don't need witnesses to have a meeting. I understand what you're trying to do and what the clerk was doing, but there are many things we can discuss among ourselves in a cooperative nature in order to move certain things forward to help the department, so I would encourage, Mr. Chairman, that there be no more cancelled meetings, if it's possible.

The third part is that 112 North is empty right now, and I'm wondering why we can't get that room. I say it with great respect. There's the television, but it would be nice to have that room back. I know veterans, when they come in, feel more comfortable, and it's easier. Maybe I'm getting lazy in my old age, but it's right down there after question period. It's right there. I wonder why we can't have that.

Lastly, the previous witness we had before this told us that over 3,500 individuals will be assisted by Bill C-55. We know that not to be true. Those are the regulation changes, not legislative changes, so I'd just like the committee to keep in mind that experts from DVA can come in and give us erroneous or false information, or maybe they just made a serious error in judgment. I don't know, but when they answered 3,500, the real answer was 500 over five years. That's quite a change in figures. I just wanted to leave it out there that sometimes department officials aren't necessarily correct themselves.

If we could just halt the cancelled meetings, we could talk about whatever. It would be a nice way to spend a couple of hours with my friends on both sides of the fence here.

• (1715)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Storseth.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** While I always enjoy spending hours with Mr. Stoffer, it's usually not at the committee table.

I would make a motion, though, Mr. Chair, that we make every effort to have our meetings at 112 North, unless the committee directs otherwise.

**The Chair:** We'll take that under advisement, because I too would like it at 112 North. Our witness on Monday is via teleconference, so it will probably have to be at Queen Street or here.

Go ahead, Mr. André.

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy André:** I enjoy talking to Mr. Stoffer and I don't want to go against his motion. I think we have to have regular meetings with witnesses. It is true that six meetings have been cancelled since last January. So we have to figure out a way to meet with the witnesses. The team must make sure that we are more consistent with our meetings. If there are no witnesses and although I really like Mr. Stoffer, I don't like him enough to come and chat with him here in committee. We can talk somewhere else. If there is no purpose to the meeting, it is useless. First and foremost, we need to have witnesses. There is work to be done and we must do it. We have to have meetings with witnesses and there is a whole process that goes with that.

[English]

**The Chair:** One thing we need going forward is some direction, rather than just saying we're all going to get together. We'll have to have a committee business meeting to make those things happen.

Ms. Sgro has a comment.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** I was going to ask you about that. Given the time that's here, I suspect we will need.... I suppose we could ask the researcher how many meetings he thinks we will need to complete the study we've been working on.

**Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré:** It all depends on you. The draft report I wrote is a very dense document. I made almost no quotes in it, but rather references to all the witnesses, and there are 15 possible recommendations. It would take a couple of hours to turn it into an official report, but it's not as long as it could have been if we had wanted a full report and had taken the time to analyze every detail.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** If we go on the assumption that things will continue as normal after this week, we have a variety of other issues we had wanted to work on before June. Could I suggest you pull out that list so that at our first opportunity, once we've completed this study, we can see what we have on that agenda? We can be working on two things at the same time anyway.

**The Chair:** We will take that under advisement too.

Go ahead, Mr. Vincent, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Vincent:** I would like to ask the analyst something about the report he is preparing. My question has to do with what I was saying earlier about the department providing us with a comparison between the two systems, the new charter and the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act. The department gave us the disability rates. Overall, there were three categories: 2% or 4%, up to 40%, and 100%. I would like these categories to be included in the report with the findings from Veterans Affairs Canada.

•(1720)

**Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré:** The report focuses on operational stress and suicide. We are making a comparison. Those elements were included in the old charter and in last year's report. They are in last year's report.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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