



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

## **Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs**

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ACVA • NUMBER 052 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

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**EVIDENCE**

**Wednesday, May 27, 2015**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Royal Galipeau**



## Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

Wednesday, May 27, 2015

• (1830)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC)):** Good evening and welcome to the 52nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

[English]

Tonight we will continue to study division 17 of part 3 of Bill C-59, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 21, 2015 and other measures.

[Translation]

The meeting will end at 7:30 p.m.

I'd like to begin by thanking the committee members for agreeing to meet today on such short notice so that we could hear from additional witnesses.

[English]

Unfortunately, scheduling this meeting next week was not an option since the Standing Committee on Finance invited our committee to present its recommendations by 9:00 a.m. next Tuesday, June 2.

This evening we will have the pleasure of hearing Robert Thibeau, president of Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones; Richard Blackwolf, national president and chief executive officer, and Joseph Burke, national service officer, Ottawa, both with the National Alliance of the Canadian Aboriginal Veterans and Serving Members Association; and finally, Jenny Migneault in a personal capacity.

[Translation]

The representatives from each of the three groups will have up to 10 minutes to give their presentation. Afterwards, members will have the opportunity to ask questions.

[English]

Mr. Thibeau, you're first. Welcome.

**Mr. Robert Thibeau (President, Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones):** Good evening.

Once again, it's a great pleasure for me to appear in front of this committee to speak to you on behalf of the Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones and its partner organization the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples veterans, as well as the first nations veterans of Canada.

I've been asked by this committee to comment specifically on division 17 of part 3 of Bill C-59, which amends the Canadian

Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act to:

- (a) add a purpose statement to that Act;
- (b) improve the transition process of the Canadian Forces members and veterans to civilian life...;
- (c) establish the retirement income security benefit to provide eligible veterans and their survivors with a continued financial benefit after the age of 65 years;
- (d) establish the critical injury benefit to provide eligible Canadian Forces members and veterans with lump-sum compensation for severe, sudden and traumatic injuries or acute diseases that are service related, regardless of whether they result in a permanent disability; and
- (e) establish the family caregiver relief benefit to provide eligible veterans who require a high level of ongoing care from an informal caregiver with an annual grant to recognize that caregiver's support.

The Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones believes that this portion of Bill C-59 as it deals with veterans requires us to examine it more closely as to the substance of what will be contained in that bill and what that actually encompasses. We feel that there needs to be a substantive commitment and positive action to prove to veterans, the veterans community and their families that this government and this nation does care for those they have sent into harm's way.

I will now briefly acknowledge the details of division 17 of part 3 and offer our words on these.

Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones and its partners are in full agreement that this looks like a step in the right direction for the Government of Canada and Veterans Affairs Canada. Transitioning of Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans and the services that have been mentioned in broad terms must include a sound and effective communication plan. There cannot be any misunderstanding as to what services are available and the benefits prescribed through Veterans Affairs. Therefore, effective communication is the key.

An issue previously brought forward to this committee by the Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones was this very issue of effective communication to rural and remote communities of aboriginals, including first nations, Métis, and the Inuit. We must consider veterans living in remote areas and develop ways to remove barriers due to location and possibly a lack of technology and to improve outreach to those veterans.

The retirement income security benefit and its establishment cannot be commented on fully at this time as we require to see the content of the proposal. We can only hope that whatever will be proposed will be acceptable to meet the needs of those veterans and families requiring this assistance and that we will not struggle later on to obtain the services for veterans or survivors.

The establishment of the critical injury benefit is another positive step forward to respond to the needs of those who suffer severe and/or traumatic injuries related to their service. Again, we must ensure that the content of this will meet the needs of the affected veterans.

During a recent trip that I took with 28 veterans of the Italian campaign—heros of Canada—I heard horrific stories of battles fought, friends lost, and pain endured. I was humbled to be included with these individuals. The stories I heard were stories that had never been talked about. They were stories of tragic events, happy occasions, and remembrance of good old friends. It certainly gave me a better understanding and an appreciation of the need to ensure that veterans are properly looked after due to their personal contributions, their personal sacrifices, and their abilities to move forward.

I was informed by some of these outstanding veterans of suicides of friends, of alcohol abuse, and of family problems suffered by returning veterans.

● (1835)

I also heard of how some were able to tackle the demons and to become successful in whatever they decided to do. There are two comments that stand out in my mind that were shared by these veterans with me.

The first one is that we had a number of aboriginals who were in our units. They were all good soldiers and we lost more than a few of them. It is too bad they were not looked after when they returned home.

Two, if it was not for the Afghanistan veterans, we veterans would not have gotten the benefits that were denied to us long ago. We can certainly see the similarities between what earlier veterans had gone through in the past and what our current veterans are going through today. Today's veterans have also suffered deeply, both physically and mentally, from recent conflicts.

Today's veterans are forced to rely on the dedicated and steadfast efforts of caregivers who in some cases are spouses, who gave up careers, took a reduction in income, and faced financial hardships, and which for some, led to a strain on relationships and a breakdown in relationships. These caregivers ensure the best of care is given. They are the ones who assist the injured while leading to the ultimate survival of the heros. No one could ever take for granted these what I term front-line defenders of our injured.

Compensation to caregivers who sacrifice everything in order to provide much in the therapeutic recovery of our veterans should not be undermined, and they must be recognized for their selfless contributions. If there is a need to continue support beyond age 65, then this should never be questioned, as we are talking about individuals who have given a great deal of themselves for the freedoms enjoyed by other Canadians.

We must also remember that as a country, Canada has sent these soldiers, sailors, air men and women to places of turmoil, conflict, and outright horror. That being the case, we should never accept the shirking of the responsibility we have for looking after injured Canadian Forces members and veterans.

In closing, I echo the comments made by both the Veterans Ombudsman and the Royal Canadian Legion. The new Veterans Charter and the enhanced Veterans Charter are considered living documents. This means that as a living document it requires review and adjustment in order for it to meet the needs of its recipients. As I have stated before, the new Veterans Charter was introduced in the House and all parties accepted it, as did the Canadian Armed Forces and a vast majority of the veterans groups. The new Veterans Charter has a number of issues and problems, but it is the job of our politicians to look to and listen to organizations that are providing good advice and offering solutions to the problems associated with veterans.

ADA stands behind the Royal Canadian Legion and the ombudsman for their tireless efforts to move forward on behalf of all veterans. ADA has always taken the stance that we will support only those organizations or groups that are for positive movement forward on veterans issues.

A final thought from one of my partner organizations is that veterans should probably be the labour force at Veterans Affairs Canada and also appointees to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board.

On behalf of myself, my partner organizations, and all Canadian veterans, I offer sincere thanks for allowing me to attend this committee.

*Meegwetch.*

● (1840)

**The Chair:** Mr. Thibeau, *meegwetch* to you. Thank you so much for your service, and thank you for your testimony today.

Mr. Blackwolf, you're next.

**Mr. Richard Blackwolf (National President and Chief Executive Officer, CAV, National Alliance, Canadian Aboriginal Veterans and Serving Members Association):**

Good evening. I'm Richard Blackwolf, the national president of Canadian Aboriginal Veterans and Serving Members Association. I'm honoured to have with me tonight, Mr. Joseph Burke, the Canadian Aboriginal Veterans national representative from Ottawa, who has an extensive medical background from his service in the military.

Mr. Chairman and honourable members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to appear before the committee and give you our thoughts and opinions on the clauses contained in division 17, part 3 of Bill C-59.

It is our understanding that Canada is one of the countries that do not maintain a large standing armed forces. The often quoted prime minister, Sir Robert Borden, in his speech to the Canadian corps on the eve of the attack on Vimy Ridge is a reflection of the covenant between the Government of Canada and the citizen volunteers of Canada who go to fight in Europe.

The new Veterans Charter is a covenant between the people of Canada and the Government of Canada to the current volunteers serving in the Canadian Armed Forces and to future citizens answering a call to arms when the country needs to fight aggression. Therefore, it is all of our duties to make the best possible charter for the care of our veterans.

Our submission today is the result of a clause-by-clause analysis of division 17, part 3 of Bill C-59, with reference to the committee's previous three questions posed last year in May.

The purpose of the act is centred on the obligation to provide services, assistance, and compensation to Canadian Forces serving members and veterans, who have been injured or die for their service and have benefits extended to their spouse, common-law spouse, children, and orphans.

Mr. Burke will address the other portion of our presentation at this time.

• (1845)

**Mr. Joseph Burke (National Service Officer, Ottawa, NAV, National Alliance, Canadian Aboriginal Veterans and Serving Members Association):**

We approve of the wording amendments for the earnings loss benefit in clause 208, and the addition (c). We also applaud the extension of the earnings loss benefit past the age of 65.

Our previous concern was that the earnings loss benefit be set at 100% of previous military net income. It is retained in the act at 75%, which represents a loss of 25% of income for the veteran. It is our opinion that this retention of 75% of previous military net income does not meet the test of fairness. We have concerns that the spousal benefit, with the retention of the 75% of previous military net income, will also not meet the test of fairness for survivors.

We applaud the powers given to the minister to waive application if it is deemed that a disability exists in proposed section 40.5.

I will turn now to critical injury benefit, disability award, a death benefit clothing allowance, and a detention benefit.

Regarding critical injury benefit, in proposed subsection 44.1(1), our interpretation of “or developed an acute disease” means physiological diseases. We request that the committee support an amendment to the proposed subsection to change the wording to read “or developed a physiological disease or psychological disorder”, thus using proper medical terminology.

We applaud the family caregiver relief provision in proposed subsection 65.1(1). However, we are appalled that there were no provisions in the bill for a caregivers monthly benefit. In our previous submission to this committee, we suggested a monthly benefit of a minimum of \$1,600 net income after taxes, and CPP deduction compensation for all their caregiving activities in the daily care for their disabled veteran.

We are further extremely disappointed that there is no provision for a child support benefit. In our previous submission to the committee, we suggested a child support benefit based on the Ontario courts schedule as an example of the support needed per child.

**Mr. Richard Blackwolf:** Thank you, Chairman Galipeau and honourable members of the committee. I bring you greetings from all our members from across Canada: the Métis nation veterans of Canada, the first nations veterans of Canada, and Inuit veterans of Canada.

Thank you for your time and interest.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Burke. Thank you very much, Mr. Blackwolf.

Madam Migneault, it's all yours.

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault (As an Individual):** I am here before you as a spouse and as a caregiver. Officially, I'm talking on my own behalf as much as I know that many veterans, many veterans organizations, as well as many politicians recognize my vital role in the healing process and recovery of my husband, a wounded warrior. I am sorry to tell you that I feel that we don't have the voice we should have right now. We can tell you a lot.

From coast to coast, in French, in English, in the native communities, I have no idea how many Jenny Migneaults there are in this country. Although I know that my situation is unique, let me tell you something: it's very similar to everyone I know, every single person I know. The biggest difference between me and many of my sisters in arms is the fact that I have a husband who allows me to talk openly and freely. Yes, he gives me the permission to break the wall of silence we live behind. I have permission to talk. My husband might be your hero. He is my hero in my life just for allowing me to be here today.

I testified before this committee for the first time in November 2007. I was 35 years old. We had three children living at home with us. I was struggling to keep a job. I was struggling to stay away from depression. I was struggling to cope with our twisted challenges—twisted challenges.

These are the last words I said back then:

I would like to say that living with someone who has post-traumatic stress syndrome has impacts and repercussions on all members of the family.

This is also what I said:

Without blowing my own trumpet, however, I believe I have succeeded in minimizing the damage. I am 35 years old, and sometimes I feel 70. I would really have appreciated the help provided by St. Anne's Centre for Claude, [my husband] for us all and for our children before this summer.

In my mind, I guess, I was stronger than 20 years of service. Well, I was wrong because I'm a failure. I have no more family; I have no more money; I have no dignity; and I have very little physical freedom now. I am a caregiver of a veteran with PTSD. No offence to anybody—no offence to my husband, no offence to all veterans of this country—but I'm sorry to tell you that I am serving my country as well, as we speak, from my fortress: my home.

My unique humanitarian mission is all about my husband's suffering. My sacrifices may not be worth a lot. They are not glorious; I admit it. I have no medals to share with you for the number of punches I received while he was sleeping. I have no medals to show the world the effort I have deployed to try to have something that would sound like a normal life to the rest of the world. I have no medals to show you our losses as a family.

Thank you so much for allowing me to testify before you tonight and to tell you how wrong I was and to share with you my view about the caregiver relief benefit. Don't expect me to talk about other measures. Although I am directly affected by the notion of financial security in our fortress, caregivers must pronounce themselves about measures that concern them directly. Am I the first one who will talk to you about the caregiver relief benefit tonight? I hope not.

It's actually strange that I get to do so almost exactly a year after my life changed drastically, on May 29, 2014, when I arrived last at a jogging race. It is when I started to talk about my reality, but most importantly, it is when I also realized how much I'm not alone.

• (1850)

Yet in May 2015, here I am to talk to you about the caregiver relief benefit. My fatigue as a caregiver is recognized. I consider this not only to be a political gain, but a social one, too. So, thank you for recognizing who I am.

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, I am drowning in my own fatigue, but this measure is not a half-measure. It's a quarter of a measure. I understand I might offend some of you who believe this measure is a great answer to my excruciating reality. Well, do you know how this measure would apply in my house? I believe it would not. Nobody I know said to me, "I feel like I would receive it."

First, my husband qualifies because of a percentage that differentiates him from most severe to severe, so it's not clear. Most of all, it's like you're asking me to tell my husband, "Honey, I need a break from you. I need a break from your PTSD. I need air from you. I need to have a little of my life without you." This is what you are asking me to tell my husband. Do you really expect him to feel good about it? No. Do you know why? He's wounded with PTSD. If you want to know what I think, I think his paranoia will make him believe I'm going away to have a nice little drinking party and probably to sleep with three-quarters of the city. This is it; this is the reality. His anxiety will make him call numerous times. He's not with me today. Would you like to see? If I don't give answer him using the right tone of voice, I can assure you I will hear about it when I go home. This is my reality.

Usually every single time I get to meet you in your office, my husband is in a parking lot somewhere sleeping and waiting for me. The caregiver relief benefit does not apply in our situation the way it is presented. Also, he won't accept a stranger in our house. He won't

even accept that his own children come and take care of him. He has his dignity too. You know what? I am the only one he trusts. As much as he would love to see them around, they are not me. My husband will end up suffering in silence while I'm gone and the children wouldn't know how to handle him.

This measure is probably supposed to give me a break, but by doing so, you are putting me in a situation of triggering my husband's anxiety and PTSD. When he's triggered or anxious, he becomes angry. In my reality, in my fortress, I live with a loving husband. When he suffers, he becomes Rambo. This is my suffering husband.

As for the money, everybody seems to forget that I have nothing and that includes financial autonomy. The pink hair and the nails that you see are only because my husband allows them, accepts them, and because he likes them. I think he thinks I look better to him. This is my life.

Do I need to tell you I most probably suffer from transfer PTSD? I'd love to tell you how I am now hypervigilant even going to the restaurant without my husband. You have no idea how much I can choose the place, be aware of the music, the sound, the time—

• (1855)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** You have half a minute left.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** I probably suffer from paranoia too, as his own paranoia made me believe even that the Conservative Party made me a target last year. Yes, people made me believe that I was seen as a national threat and I was on some kind of list. Can't you realize that I'm not that important? Very briefly, do I need to tell you that if my husband would divorce me tomorrow morning, I would end up literally homeless? I have nothing. I have poor mental health right now. I'm 18 years old. What would I do?

As I said, my sacrifices may not be worth a lot to you, but to me my isolation makes me see suicide as a final answer, because my guilt won't allow me to leave my husband, and on the other hand I don't see how I could continue like this for many years. I am a total failure.

Recently a wife separated from her husband after 13 years of marriage. She tried to call his case manager who wouldn't call her back anymore. They are separated. He is the serving member; she is nothing anymore. There's no more help for her or for her son. What happens when we can't stay?

I'm sorry. There are solutions to address the caregiver—

[*Translation*]

Please—

[English]

No, I don't need this right now.

•(1900)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Ms. Migneault, your time was up two minutes ago.

[English]

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** These are my last words. Which word is making you afraid: legislation, compensation, or recognition? I just want you to remember that in my world and in my husband's world, time is a silent killer.

That's all I have to say for now.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Ms. Migneault, thank you for your remarks. The fact that you shared your story with the committee shows your continued service to the country. Thank you.

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** I wish every politician would agree to meet with me when I asked and listen to what I had to say, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** It's a privilege for the committee to hear what you have to say.

[English]

Now, there's half an hour left of the meeting. In order to allow every member of the committee to participate—and this might not even work—my attempt is to suggest to members of the committee that each one take four minutes. Please do not take the whole four minutes for yourself if you really want answers from the witnesses.

[Translation]

Mr. Chicoine, it is your turn.

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd also like to thank the witnesses for joining us this evening and answering our questions.

Ms. Migneault, we understand that you are a bit disappointed with the amount of the caregiver relief benefit. A question came to mind. Would you have preferred to have the benefit included in the veterans independence program, which you do not qualify for either? It's meant for activities such as housekeeping and yard maintenance, in order to give caregivers a break.

If the benefit had been included in the veterans independence program, would it have been helpful to you, given that you also have fairly young children at home?

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** The measure would have actually enabled me to keep working longer. One of the problems I encountered was case managers telling me that I was there to do the work and take over. That's the argument they would use to deny my husband services.

That said, another problem is the form that the benefit has been given. Something I would like everyone to understand is that, in the context of my relationship and family reality, my fatigue needs to be taken into account. I can't be separated from my position as a

member of a couple. There are no if's, and's or but's about it; I am well when my husband is well.

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine:** Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Thibeau.

Mr. Burke talked briefly about the retirement income security benefit. His preference would have been to have the earnings loss benefit set at 100%.

Would you be in favour of an amendment to establish the benefit at 100% as opposed to 70% and to continue providing the same amount to veterans after the age of 65?

[English]

**Mr. Robert Thibeau:** Yes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine:** Mr. Burke, you also answered this question in your opening statement. You would have preferred to see

—  
[English]

**Mr. Joseph Burke:** The basic premise that we're trying to hit here is the equation. In the equation that you're proposing, the 70% is 70% of the 75%, which is actually around 52%. What we're basically asking for is what we asked for last year. Bring it up to 100%; then, when you use the 70% that you're using, that percentage goes up into the 60%-plus range, which is a little more doable for somebody....

Everybody is talking about this base wage. You have to remember that many of the people in the forces aren't on base wage. They're going through 15 to 20 years at 20% above base wage, and now they've lost that 20%. Now you're taking them down to 75%, so they're losing another 25% of what their actual wage is.

We're asking to bring it up to an actual 100% base wage for just the ELB. When they hit 65, then you can do your little funky equation and things work out. But if you don't change that one thing, then the whole rest of it goes to pot. It's like a house of cards.

•(1905)

[Translation]

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine:** Ms. Migneault, I'm going to come back to you. I'll give you a chance to take a breath first.

Am I out of time?

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds left.

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine:** Fine.

What would you have liked to see in the bill, in terms of giving you some relief?

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** Initiatives already exist, such as Wounded Warriors Canada and Can Praxis. It's necessary to address—

[English]

caregiver fatigue as a couple, as a family, and with also an input of education—just tools that I will bring back home to make a difference. Don't forget that PTSD is a process; we cannot solve this overnight.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Hawn, it is now over to you.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC):** Thank you very much to all the witnesses.

Thank you, Ms. Migneault, for sharing your story with us.

[*English*]

You have concerns, obviously, about the caregiver benefit. It's well-intentioned. I think people would agree with that. Can I ask you what your ideal solution would be? What's your ideal proposal for it?

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** Would money be a problem in my answer?

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** No, no, just tell me whatever you're—

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** Let's say that I can dream about it.

It would be a centre, a physical centre, to which families could come, and couples. It would be accessible to everybody. We need respite. But you know, the social....

[*Translation*]

I'm going to switch to French, if you don't mind. It's easier for me.

Just getting out of the house is a challenge. We don't have any friends left. We don't see family. Nothing. We don't have any money to go out.

It would be wonderful to have a centre or a Wounded Warriors in a physical location, somewhere where injured soldiers could have access to all the activities and be amongst themselves. The spouses, on their end, also network. Workshops could be given from time to time; that would make a huge difference.

We can't simply rest, because when we go back home, we have to deal with the same problems. That's why education is so important. I'd like to see an actual place where, for instance, RCMP and air force members could come, on a rotating basis. That way, we could get people to work together and provide them with education.

That's a bit of a two-in-one solution that would help address a caregiver's fatigue while supporting veterans with PTSD. My husband has PTSD, and having a place like that would help both of us.

[*English*]

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Where would you put that centre? Have you thought about how many centres you would have to have across the country?

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** If there were only one, it would already be great.

If only you knew the difference that resources like Can Praxis and Wounded Warriors make in the life of a caregiver. You have no idea.

First of all, we live so much in silence. Don't forget that most times the wounded warriors don't like to live in the middle of the city, with the sirens and too many uncoordinated crowds and so on. We end up living pretty much alone. Nobody understands us. So meeting with others makes a difference.

The real difference comes from the street education.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** There are organizations that do retreats. Once a year, one happens in Alberta, and so on.

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** Yes.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Are you talking about one of those somewhere, once a year?

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** It would be as needed.

I know I look devastated. Honestly I am, but I was much worse five, six, seven years ago. It's a process. So if I needed it, honestly, for two weeks a year until I didn't need it as much, why not?

You must provide us with the help that we need when we need it, not when the system decides that this is the number of sessions we can have, for instance, with a psychologist.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Okay. I understand.

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** Do you understand my point, Mr. Hawn?

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** I do indeed.

I'm done.

**The Chair:** Mr. Valeriote.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Thank you, everyone, for appearing tonight.

Ms. Migneault, you've given the most compelling testimony I think this committee has heard, at least in the year that I've been here. I don't think we do appreciate what caregivers are suffering.

I personally found it insulting that \$7,238 per year would be given through the family caregiver relief benefit and that it would be considered enough to provide what they call respite, the break that you speak of.

I want you to answer two questions.

First, I understand that what you and others like you really needed, apart from a place to go which you spoke of earlier, was income replacement, because you've given up your career. Would you speak to us about that?

Second, if there is not going to be income replacement, can you talk to me about the adequacy of \$7,238 per year, which is \$139 per week? Does that provide enough money for the respite, if you were able to leave your home?

There are two questions there.

● (1910)

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** It's only with the years that you realize the impact of staying at home. First of all, there's the income loss, of course. We feel it in the fridge. We are three people living on my husband's pension. We had some water damage, and last night, actually, I almost slept in my car in order to be here today—I'll be honest with you—because we had \$40 left until midnight. That's our reality.

Of course, if I were working it would make a difference. That income replacement is necessary. I have children of my own. My husband also ended up paying for them as much.... They were not his children. My daughter's in Japan right now. I cannot help her during her studies, with anything.

I'm sorry. I'm very tired.

Second of all, concerning that \$7,000, you have to keep in mind that I don't have that money. If you expect me to hire someone or to buy a plane ticket...or, as someone suggested yesterday, if I wanted to bring my children from B.C. to Quebec, I must have the money. I don't.

So it does not apply. It's not helpful to me. It's not.

Is it enough? Well, it's not a replacement; it's a relief benefit. If it came with a sort of income, that would be different.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Do you know others in your circumstances?

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** Would you like to have a list from coast to coast?

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Please.

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** I will ask them.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** How many others are in your circumstances?

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** I can't tell you the number, but I can tell you that in the past year I've been talking not only to spouses, but also to many veterans who are now single and who have explained to me what happened to them, why they ended up alone. I've been talking also to military spouses and, to a lesser extent, I must say, serving members.

So yes, I can provide you with names. I will contact them and share their names, if they want to.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Thank you.

Mr. Burke, Mr. Blackwolf, or Mr. Thibeau, how are veterans in isolated areas being taken care of now by Veterans Affairs?

**Mr. Richard Blackwolf:** Well, we are in contact with our veterans across the country. I personally phone our senior elders, the World War II veterans, on a regular basis. We contact our—

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Veterans Affairs is taking care of them.

**Mr. Richard Blackwolf:** Well, that's what we ask. We ensure their care by asking them directly, the World War II veterans particularly and also the Korean War veterans who are all now in their eighties. Then there are the other ones that are in their...Cold War veterans like myself in their seventies. We do have a lot of young veterans and they ask us questions about the new Veterans Charter. We do get a lot of feedback. We also have 20 groups on the social media. We have a great interface there with all age groups. We're a full spectrum national veterans organization. We even have a division in Southeast Asia, and we're connected with the Australian veterans.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Blackwolf.

Mr. Valeriote, you've taken three times the amount of time that I said you had left.

Monsieur Lizon.

**Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC):** Mr. Chair, before I ask the question, I need to put something on the record.

The Liberal member, in his opening remarks before he asked a question, mentioned how appalled and how insulted he is by the caregiver benefit proposed in this legislation. I would like to remind him that the previous government, the Liberal government in 1995, made the deepest cuts to veterans, taking away benefits, and taking away benefits that took more than 15 years to restore. Many of the veterans, including those that fought in the Italian campaign, never lived long enough to get it back. I say to the member, you are sitting with those people in the House today that did that. I know you are not in the House, but don't say you are appalled by something that's proposed that's a real benefit. Maybe it's not enough, but you know, I'm appalled by the way you speak because it was your government that hurt veterans the most in the history of this country.

Now I would like to ask a question. Thank you to the witnesses for coming here to this committee. Thank you for your service, and for your work for veterans and for the country. I have one question. I understand from your remarks that what is proposed is a step in the right direction. It's not enough. What would you advise us as members of Parliament? Should we pass the legislation? Of course, this is a step. It's an incremental change, but would you advise us to vote for it and pass it as quickly as possible so the veterans can receive what is proposed and then look for improvements, or would you ask us to scrap it? This is for both of you.

●(1915)

**Mr. Robert Thibeau:** You know what? We can sit here and come to Ottawa every month and continue sitting as a committee, getting feedback and talking about, in this case, this particular bill. I listened to the Legion's presentation yesterday. It is a step in the right direction. We can't afford not to let it pass, but we have to be able to, as a living document...it has to be manipulated in the right direction. When I hear this lady speak here, and I think of the people I met this past summer at the 100th anniversary of the Princess Patricia's and see the suffering of PTSD victims, then this voice has to be heard. You guys and gals, and everybody in the House, have to sit down and stop pointing the fingers across the table and playing the blame game, because you're talking about people who have sacrificed too much and gotten very little back.

Now, that's my voice. Thank you.

**Mr. Richard Blackwolf:** As I mentioned in the presentation, this is the covenant we're making for our service in Canada. It's a covenant between the people, the government, and those that will volunteer. The documents and the legislation have to reflect that care. They did this in 1942 with all the measures they took for returning veterans. This is a new era. The 2006 new Veterans Charter entered a new era. It had many flaws. We're still working on the flaws. We believe this legislation should go forward. We've made a few changes here. We've asked the committee to support the small number of word changes, even that one where it says you develop a disease. When you google disease, you get 4,000 things, but they don't include PTSD; they don't include psychological disorders. That's why we've asked to have reference to physiological disease and psychological disease.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Blackwolf.

[Translation]

Ms. Moore, it's your turn.

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are for Ms. Migneault. I'd just like to know her take on my logic.

In a case like your husband's, which I've seen before, it's clear to me that anyone who comes to your home to replace you has to be a qualified professional; that person has to know how to deal with individuals living with problems like your husband's.

In terms of building trust, it seems obvious to me that the person should meet with you, both you and your husband, repeatedly, several times a week. It would start gradually, with 15-minute increments, increasing to 20 minutes, 30 minutes and so forth. It would take many hours of working together before you would be able to leave the house for a few hours, or perhaps even an entire day, to visit family.

When you divide \$7,238 by the hourly wage of a private nurse, it doesn't take long before you run out of hours. Do you think that's a problem and that it can't be adapted in some situations?

I did a quick calculation, and if you need someone 24 hours a day, the amount is equivalent to 6 days of private nursing care a year.

●(1920)

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** I'm not sure whether every spouse in the country in my situation would agree, but this is my personal opinion.

You talked about the hourly wage of a nurse. Am I a nurse? Am I to become a support worker? I would have to be trained. You can give me money but without training... Money doesn't buy happiness. Yes, I need financial compensation. If I was making \$90,000 before, does that mean that the government should pay me \$90,000? I don't think so.

If we had a reasonable amount, that would be a great start. Right now, we have nothing. In fact, I would even say we have less than nothing. Sometimes, we have to leave or we get left behind; it happens a lot. Often, once veterans get their pensions and their money, the wounds don't seem as bad. Many decide to move on; they buy a motorcycle and just take off.

We have no security, we need a decent starting point. It's a matter of dignity. Dignity is what I am fighting for.

**Ms. Christine Moore:** Mr. Thibeau, I'd like to know what veterans' accommodations are like. How do they manage to find housing?

[English]

**The Chair:** You have 45 seconds.

**Mr. Robert Thibeau:** For accommodation and housing?

**Ms. Christine Moore:** Do you have any problem with housing?

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Homelessness.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine:** Do veterans have problems with housing?

**Ms. Christine Moore:** Do veterans have problems with housing?

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds left.

[English]

**Mr. Robert Thibeau:** I did attend a meeting that the Legion had on homelessness. The only thing I can say is there are groups out there on the issue of homelessness. I am not on...I don't deal specifically with homeless veterans unless they are brought somewhere into our organization, unless I hear about it.

**Ms. Christine Moore:** Thank you.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Moore.

[English]

Mr. Opitz.

**Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC):** Thank you all for being here.

Ms. Migneault, I have no words except God bless. I can feel it.

I don't have a lot of time. I'd like to give Mr. Thibeau, Mr. Blackwolf, and Mr. Burke an opportunity, but I'd like to give you a minute of the four minutes to add anything you'd like to add right now.

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** The only thing I'd like to say is please, listen to us and include us. I feel if we had been consulted before this measure was announced, we would have been able to explain to you the limitations and the challenges that we are living with, and therefore, maybe it would have been presented and developed differently.

**Mr. Ted Opitz:** Mr. Thibeau, thank you very much for your presentation as well. I thought it was quite good. Is there anything further you would like to contribute?

I read some areas, too, where at some point you all talked about reservists and their contributions as well. Perhaps you'd like to touch on that.

**Mr. Robert Thibeau:** I did read the piece on what they're doing for the reserves, and again, I think it's a good process and a good step forward.

Over 38 years I've dealt with a lot of reservists, whether they were in the reserve unit or attached to a regular force unit, so I know their capabilities and some of the things they've gone through.

The hard and fast thing, when I listen to Jenny talking here, is I also think back to the returning reservists who leave their friends and comrades they've been overseas with and who have absolutely nothing to go to. There were a lot of problems with that. Hopefully, that is one of the points being looked at.

But I agree 100% with Jenny. The people who are most affected by PTSD are not just the veterans themselves but those people who are destined now to look after them, and they have to be included.

•(1925)

**Mr. Ted Opitz:** As a former CO, I know there is a challenge with the reservists when they return, because they're not in garrison. It's hard to muck along to them all the time.

Mr. Blackwolf or Mr. Burke, please, because I think I have a minute left.

**Mr. Richard Blackwolf:** Yes, we're advocates for the family as we brought forward in our presentation before. A family benefit and a child benefit are missing in this particular enactment. We will pursue those. We have a veterans services page where we list all the resources we're aware of. If we'd been consulted about the inclusion here of respite, we would have said to please make it a family respite, because particularly in the cases where there are psychological problems, separation is not possible. To get the family away to a new setting for a bit of a vacation is probably a greater thing. But as you said, we weren't consulted on that. We would have asked....

Mind you, the committee, I believe, still has the power to change the wording there from "caregiver" respite to "family" respite. They could still have the \$7,200, or whatever it is.

On the Canadian Forces, we listed it on our website, too. There are vacation places where people can go, and that would be excellent. We are great supporters of the family. We hate to see the families being broken up, because this is an unbearable thing when you have a severely disabled veteran. Now, those categories are different. The psychological ones require more of a different tack, and the tack would be a family respite, possibly, more than an individual one.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Blackwolf.

Mr. Hayes.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC):** I don't have any questions, Chair.

With two minutes left, I'll defer to Mr. Hawn.

**A voice:** If you want to start, you go ahead.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** Sure, Mr. Lemieux.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC):** Thank you.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here this evening. I know some of you were there last evening. We've had some very good testimony from our witnesses. As I mentioned in my opening remarks yesterday, what we have in front of us as a committee, and what we will ultimately have in front of us in the House when the bill goes back to the House, are very concrete measures that are aimed at benefiting veterans. When they pass into law, veterans will benefit from these measures.

Your testimony is much appreciated. It is acknowledged that this is not the end of the work. In other words, this is not the end of the line. This is a beginning, in a sense, but the measures are very concrete in nature.

What I've heard most witnesses say is that they support the measures as they are presented. They might have suggested changes, but they support what is contained within the legislation moving forward so that veterans will actually benefit.

Perhaps I'll just ask Mr. Blackwolf. Would it be an accurate representation of your position that what is in front of us would be of benefit to veterans and should move forward?

**Mr. Richard Blackwolf:** As we've mentioned, we do support this legislation, but there are some tweaks, if you want to call them that. We've asked for changes to the wording, and also I think it's within the power of the committee to make those recommendations. I think a small thing like changing the respite to a family one, where there's an option for the caregiver to go on their own in cases where that's appropriate and in other cases where the family can go together....

We have dealings with several of the groups, like Can Praxis, where they bring in a couple to handle the horses. We're also involved with the group that is going across the country on horseback, involving over 700 veterans from Victoria to Saint John. These are all great things to be involved in and we're right in the front line and we're in constant contact with our members, and a lot of new members, about their issues.

•(1930)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Blackwolf.

I would like to thank all our witnesses this evening, especially for your dignified presentations. I'd like to thank Madame Migneault for opening her heart to us.

**Mrs. Jenny Migneault:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** The 53rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs will be tomorrow morning in the usual room, 112 North, from 8:45 to 10:45. [*English*]

[*Translation*]

We'll discuss proposed recommendations for the Standing Committee on Finance in camera.

Have a good evening. I'll see you tomorrow.

The meeting is adjourned.

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