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Chair

Mr. Gordon Brown

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone. We will call to order meeting number 40 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

We have appearing today the Honourable Shelly Glover, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, along with a couple of her officials: Graham Flack, the deputy minister, and Andrew Francis, the chief financial officer.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), today we will be studying the main estimates 2015-16, and we will vote on those. As well, we will study the subject matter of the supplementary estimates pursuant to Standing Order 108(2).

To start the meeting, Minister, you have 10 minutes.

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages): Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I want to take a moment to express how much I've appreciated coming to your committee, and I want to thank the committee members.

This may in fact be one of my last committee appearances, so I did want to wish you all the best and thank you again for being so great at looking at these studies with a full view and trying to do your very best to maintain support, as we have as the Government of Canada, for arts, culture, and heritage.

I'm pleased to be here today with our deputy minister and of course our department's chief financial officer. I'm going to discuss a number of things, including what the committee has asked me to discuss with regard to the main estimates.

[Translation]

The committee has asked me to speak about the main estimates for the Department of Canadian Heritage and portfolio organizations in 2015-2016.

Let me begin by giving you some of the highlights of the department's main estimates.

For the 2015-2016 fiscal year, the department's budget is \$1.25 billion.

[English]

The department's budget includes \$173.7 million in operating expenses and \$1.06 billion in grants and contributions. In total, this year's main estimates represent a reduction of \$135.4 million from

last year. This is mainly due to the fact that we have contributed most of the \$500 million we committed to the Toronto 2015 Pan Am and Parapan Am Games.

[Translation]

We will continue to provide funding for our cultural strategy for the Toronto 2015 Pan Am and Parapan Am Games. And we have allotted \$16 million to various commemorative projects to celebrate our history and our heritage as part of the lead-up to the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017.

The road to 2017 presents a great opportunity to help Canadians learn more about their history and the events that helped shape our country. And our museums play a major role in that regard.

[English]

Let me mention two exhibitions. At the Canadian Museum of History, we have "1867—Rebellion and Confederation", and at the Canadian War Museum, we have the "Royal Canadian Legion Hall of Honour", presented until December 2017.

Since 2012 our government has encouraged Canadians to get to know and celebrate the many milestones on the road to the 150th anniversary of Confederation. This anniversary will be a time to celebrate all that makes Canada a remarkable country, including our rich history. It will also be the ideal time to think about the ways in which we can give back to our communities and make our country even stronger and more united.

[Translation]

We consulted Canadians on how they wanted to celebrate, and we listened to them. Our citizens' spirit of initiative and the ability of our communities to build connections with one another will play a significant role in the 2017 celebrations. Canada's 150th anniversary belongs to all of us, and, together, we will make it a momentous occasion.

[English]

Canadian Heritage will work with all government departments to get Canadians involved in the preparations of our country's anniversary. We will help bring people with great ideas and initiatives together with funding partners, so that everyone benefits. We will facilitate and support the efforts of Canadians to organize celebrations in their communities.

[Translation]

To increase awareness as we approach 2017, we have launched a number of projects, celebrations and commemorations.

And over the next two years, we want all Canadians to learn even more about this country's history and be proud of our shared heritage. Next year, we will support commemorative activities for several historical events.

[English]

We're also helping raise awareness of important milestones. For example, in 2014 we created media messages to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Charlottetown and Quebec conferences. These were the conferences that led to Confederation. These messages were presented on television, on the web, and on social media. In fact, the Fathers of Confederation campaign had a reach of 48 million through social media counts, and videos for the campaign were viewed more than 480,000 times.

● (1535)

[Translation]

We have also highlighted other important events in our history. For example, in 2013 we marked the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 and the battle for Canada with the erection of a commemorative monument.

In 2014, we marked the 100th anniversary of the First World War and the 75th anniversary of the Second World War.

And this year, we celebrated the 200th anniversary of the birth of Sir John A. Macdonald, the very first prime minister of Canada, and the 150th anniversary of our national flag.

[English]

We are committed to our youth as well. With a budget of \$17.7 million, the Exchanges Canada program is providing almost 12,500 young people with opportunities to learn more about Canada, connect with one another, and appreciate the diversity and shared aspects of the Canadian experience.

Also, on the road to 2017, we are celebrating our identity as a leading sport nation. As you know, 2015 has been declared the "Year of Sport" here in Canada. As you will note, we will be hosting a number of very important international sport competitions across the country. I hope you'll all take part.

[Translation]

The Year of Sport in Canada got off to an exciting start as Canada hosted the World Junior Hockey Championships. Other important moments in the Year of Sport are coming, such as the FIFA Women's World Cup from June 6 to July 5, the Pan American Games from July 10 to July 26 and the Parapan Am Games from August 7 to 15 in Toronto.

The Toronto 2015 Games will showcase our country's excellence in sport and leave a lasting legacy. They will also create economic, cultural and community development opportunities for southern Ontario and beyond.

[English]

The FIFA Women's World Cup also will be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for our athletes, as well as for the host city. As a former women's soccer player and soccer coach, and of course as a proud Winnipegger, I'm looking forward to this event especially because some of it is going to be played in my home city of Winnipeg, but

Vancouver, Edmonton, Ottawa, Montreal, and Moncton will also be enjoying this wonderful sport.

I encourage all Canadians to take part in the games and all sport events and to cheer on our athletes.

[Translation]

During the Year of Sport, we want to encourage people of all ages and abilities and communities across the country to get involved in sport at all levels, because sport and physical activity keep us healthy, as individuals and as members of communities. We want to celebrate all aspects of our great country as we approach our 150th anniversary—our history, our heritage, and also our thriving arts and culture scene.

[English]

Arts, culture, and heritage represent close to \$50 billion every year in the Canadian economy and over 647,000 jobs across the country.

Our artists, creators, and performers are our pride. Their talent enriches our daily lives and enhances our country's reputation abroad.

Manitoba alone has produced such well-known artists as Daniel Lavoie—who Quebec adopted—and of course Chic Gamine, who come from my own riding. My province and my city are also home to a world-class symphony orchestra, which was invited to perform an all-Canadian program at Carnegie Hall in New York City last year.

[Translation]

Our commitment to arts and culture remain strong. Last year, we made funding permanent for programs supporting arts and culture. In the 2015-2016 main estimates, aside from Canadian Heritage, the portfolio organizations are receiving \$1.8 billion in appropriations. The Canada Council for the Arts, for instance, receives \$182 million. This includes the permanent renewal of an investment of \$5 million per year.

[English]

We support Canada's creative sectors and we recognize the significant cultural and economic contributions they make. For example, in the audiovisual industry, we provide approximately \$95 million to Telefilm Canada and close to \$60 million to the National Film Board.

We're also proud of our musical sector. Canada is the third-largest exporter of musical talents in the world and the seventh-largest market in the world for recorded music. The Canada music fund gives Canadians and the rest of the world better access to Canadian music. In an average year, the fund helps support over 400 album production projects and 1,100 marketing, touring, and showcasing initiatives.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

I am also delighted with the success of our audiovisual sector. Every year, we invest more than \$660 million through Telefilm Canada, the National Film Board, Canada Media Fund and through tax credit programs. In 2013-2014, we disbursed \$134.1 million through the Canada Media Fund, which has been renewed permanently.

Our support has resulted in some impressive successes. I have had the pleasure of participating in the presentation of the Juno Awards this year, as well as the Canadian Screen Awards, the ADISQ Gala and the Jutra Gala. I saw how much talent this country has, not only in music, but in theatre, visual art and film and video production.

In the fields of arts and culture, Canadians have a lot of choices. And I believe that it should also be true of their access to television.

[*English*]

Of course, we all know that in October of 2013 the Speech from the Throne reiterated our government's belief that "Canadian families should be able to choose the combination of television channels they want." We said that we would "require channels to be unbundled". Our commitment to providing Canadians with greater channel choice is just part of our government's plan to take action to ensure greater choice and competition that benefits consumers.

[*Translation*]

Canadians know that a consumers-first approach is good for everyone. Following the Speech from the Throne, the CRTC launched its Let's Talk TV review of the Canadian television system, a conversation with Canadians so as to examine the television system in Canada. Our government wants to ensure that the television system fosters choice and flexibility in channel selection, encourages the creation of compelling and diverse programs, and empowers Canadians to make informed choices and have recourse in the case of disputes with their television service providers.

[*English*]

At our request, the CRTC produced a report last April on how to improve Canadian consumers' access to pay and specialty television services on a pick-and-pay basis. After a public process, the CRTC has now put forward the framework to require the industry to provide Canadians with more choice, including an affordable entry-level basic service and the ability to design their own television packages. Our government is pleased that the CRTC has taken into account the views of Canadian consumers in their recent decisions of March 19.

[*Translation*]

This decision is an important step toward ensuring Canadian consumers enjoy choice and flexibility in their television services. Our government will monitor the implementation of these measures, and we call on all industry players to deliver the choice Canadians deserve as soon as possible.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, our government has accomplished a great deal in recent years to strengthen our arts and cultural sector, ensure an effective sport system and encourage

Canadians to appreciate their history and heritage by learning more about it. We have many initiatives planned between now and 2017, and I am delighted about that.

I would now be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll now go to questions. We'll go to Mr. Young for seven minutes.

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you very much for appearing before the committee today to discuss the budget measures for Canadian Heritage.

I want to talk a bit about unbundling. For years I have discussed this with my constituents, who have come to me and asked why they have to pay for all these channels that they don't want. I have constituents who are interested in sports and news, and other constituents who are interested in watching old movies and arts and entertainment. I've never had a good answer for them. I'm thinking of the channels that I don't watch, of course, because sometimes it's a little annoying when you switch the channels and end up with something you don't want. For instance, I never watch the Shopping Channel, although I do respect people who watch the Shopping Channel.

I've never had an answer for my constituents before now, so I was really pleased to see the CRTC's announcement that they're unbundling television channels. I wonder if you could comment on how this will affect Canadian consumers.

Hon. Shelly Glover: Thank you very much for the question.

I have to agree. As this was all unfolding, that was a very common response that I received from different Canadian consumers who didn't understand why they had to pay for channels they didn't want in order to get the ones they did want. That is why we asked the CRTC to look at ways of implementing unbundled channels. That's what they've done. They've reported back to us on how they're going to do this.

How will this affect consumers? First of all, in their decision, the CRTC made sure to indicate that there is going to be a choice, but also that there is going to be a variety of choices. They insisted on focusing on a couple of different options. For example, the pick-and-pay option would basically unbundle all of the channels. They hope that will be available across the board. In fact, they're saying that it must be available across the board.

They're also cognizant of the fact that some people will want to build their own packages, so they'd like to see some form of building your own package. Also, then, there are some who are content with packages that are already available, and the CRTC was clear that for those who want that choice, it should be available as well. The very last thing is that the CRTC felt that the basic television service was so large that they wanted to offer what's now called the "skinny basic"—just the basics.

We're going back to what used to exist, frankly, and I think it's a good step. Consumers don't want to waste time looking for what they want on television. They want to pick only the things they enjoy watching. This plan will give them not only choice in television channels but choice in the amount of money they budget for television every single month. It is up to them to decide what they want to pay for. I think this is great news for consumers. Frankly, it's been a long time coming. I'm proud that the government ordered the CRTC to look at this.

• (1545)

Mr. Terence Young: Minister, could you expand a little on your comment about the cost to consumers? We don't have any numbers yet, as far as I know, on what it might cost for the skinny basic or if you buy one of the packages. Do you have any idea?

Hon. Shelly Glover: This is something that we will have a better view of as the providers roll out their different plans, but the bottom line is that when status quo packages were offered by the provider with no exceptions allowed, there was no choice at all in cost. Even if consumers didn't want the 102 channels offered by a particular provider—maybe they only wanted 20—they didn't have the choice to pay less and they didn't have the choice to get fewer channels.

This is in fact a good thing for consumers, because they get to pick what exactly they're going to be able to watch. The skinny basic itself is going to be very reasonable. The CRTC has suggested \$25 through its report to us, and I think that's pretty reasonable. I can't remember the last time that I've had a \$25 bill for television access. I have five children, and I can tell you that there are a lot of options they don't agree on. Boy, would I have appreciated that \$25 over the last several years.

Once again, the cost will be up to the consumer.

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you.

In my riding of Oakville, about 60% of the people live in Oakville and work somewhere else so they don't have a lot of time to watch TV. They want to watch the news or they want to get their information, so that's very helpful.

There are also a lot of home businesses in Oakville. I operated a home business from about 2000 to 2006. I was the only employee, so my computer was my lifeline to the world. I remember getting junk emails and spam. It got very bad. It wasted a tremendous amount of my time. My accountant asked me what my time was worth, so at that point I attached to it a figure of \$200 an hour. I figured out that I was wasting \$800 a week dealing with spam, downloading programs to keep spam out of my computer, and then managing those programs as well as the cost of the programs. There was a considerable cost, and primarily of my own time, when I could be out finding new business or serving my clients.

In the main estimates, there's a line item for the CRTC that includes \$0.1 million related to email spam reporting. Could you please comment on what that funding is for?

Hon. Shelly Glover: Thanks for the question.

It's another example of some of the efforts of this government to ensure consumers have the best possible options available to them. One thing we've heard about many times, as you've just said, is that consumers have been receiving a lot of spam emails. This is email

they're not asking for and email they don't want, so we as the government passed anti-spam legislation, which included some requirements to monitor. As a result, the CRTC in fact will have some responsibility. The line item in the main estimates with regard to the CRTC will go towards a reporting centre to help protect Canadians from unsolicited emails. They'll also help with spyware and malware and that kind of thing.

This is a common complaint that many of us are aware of as members of Parliament. People like to share these opinions with us, so we're delivering on this aspect of consumer choice and protecting consumers, and once again we're very proud to do so.

• (1550)

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Young.

We'll now go to Monsieur Nantel for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Glover, for having come to meet with us. There are a lot of topics we wish to discuss with you.

If you have no objection, we are going to set aside the matters regarding consumers in order to talk about heritage. I would of course like to discuss Radio-Canada with you.

The media often say that Radio-Canada executives would like to move into smaller premises. This is true across the country, but in Montreal more particularly, the Maison de Radio-Canada is going to reduce the space it occupies by approximately two-thirds if the forecasts are correct. We are talking about a real estate project, and its various phases will apparently cost over \$4 million, an amount which must be approved by cabinet under subsection 48(2) of the Broadcasting Act.

As Minister of Canadian Heritage, you are responsible for the application of this act. Consequently, I have a few questions for you.

In light of the very specific information I am asking for, I would ask that your staff or yourself submit the answers to these questions in writing to this committee as quickly as possible. Of course, we are aware that it is normal for a public broadcaster to modernize its technical equipment. That said, it is relevant to ensure that we are not seeing, rather, a liquidation of its assets which will diminish its production capacity proportionally.

Here are my five questions.

First of all, is Radio-Canada divesting itself of technical equipment as we speak? Could you provide this committee with its inventory as well as the assessed value of what has been sold by the management of Radio-Canada since 2008?

Secondly, could you let us know what will happen to the archives, photographs in particular as well as the Radio-Canada audio and video documents, for instance the documents contained in its library, sheet music, or any other document of value?

Thirdly, has Library and Archives Canada been involved in this project, in compliance with section 16 of the Act to establish the Library and Archives of Canada?

Fourth, how is Radio-Canada disposing of its assets? We were told in the past that the Treasury Board Secretariat was doing it through crown assets, but that this was no longer the case today.

Fifth, what procedure should Radio-Canada follow in such a case?

I am giving the five questions to our clerk. We would very much appreciate your specific replies to these questions as soon as possible.

I would now like to talk about Radio-Canada buildings.

As I said earlier, Radio-Canada has to obtain cabinet authorization for any real property transaction of more than \$4 million. Take for example the Radio-Canada tower on René-Lévesque Boulevard in Montreal. The P3 project we have heard about more or less triggered the costume-related crisis. This led 25,000 people to demonstrate in the streets of Montreal, mainly for the three reasons, which I will explain.

Claiming that there had been a \$60,000 deficit over two years, which is all in all quite small, the operations of this costume resource were shut down. This speaks to a very cavalier attitude and a carelessness with regard to the heritage value of this wealth of costumes, and of course to negligence regarding the role Radio-Canada is supposed to play, in the cultural community in particular, to further creation in arts and theatre. The costume repository was clearly an important resource for the entire cultural milieu when it needed costumes. I am speaking here of theatre, film and television.

We are happy to learn that a group seems to want to acquire all of the costumes. That is good news for us. However, may we hope that the Maison de Radio-Canada and CBC will host this group that will manage the inventory? Canadians would certainly want Radio-Canada to remain a concrete point of convergence for all resources and talents, as regards heritage or the dissemination of culture in Montreal.

To conclude, I would like a situation report on the acceptance of the P3 project with regard to the Maison de Radio-Canada in Montreal.

Hon. Shelly Glover: Thank you.

It goes without saying that I understand the role Radio-Canada plays very well. With regard to your first questions, we are going to do our best to provide the answers as quickly as possible.

Regarding the decisions made by Radio-Canada, you would know very well that concerning several of them, the government is not involved. Radio-Canada is responsible for its own daily decisions. Some of your questions, Mr. Nantel, should be addressed to Mr. Hubert Lacroix and to the members of his team. They manage these files. They released their strategy in 2014, but they also said in 2011 that their strategy involved selling certain buildings. So those questions would be better addressed to them.

PPP Canada is an organization at arm's length from the government. Even though it comes under the Department of

Finance, it is independent. That is why any question regarding the P3s should be addressed directly to that organization.

• (1555)

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you, Madam Minister.

In other words, when the first question regarding Radio-Canada's obligation to seek cabinet approval has been answered, you will be able to answer all of these other questions. Currently, Canadians are concerned about the big fire sale at Radio-Canada, for a total amount that would need validation and approval from cabinet.

I would also like to talk to you about the recent CRTC decisions. As administrator of the Broadcasting Act you must certainly know that section 5(2) says the following:

The Canadian broadcasting system should be regulated and supervised in a flexible manner that

(a) is readily adaptable to the different characteristics of English and French language broadcasting and to the different conditions under which broadcasting undertakings [...] operate;

Do you recognize that the implementation of recent CRTC decisions by that organization do not take the realities of the Canadian francophonie into account in the least, particularly in Quebec? Many people have in fact raised the issue, and I have written to you on this topic.

Hon. Shelly Glover: As I said in my reply letter, and as I mentioned repeatedly, some decisions are not governmental. Of course, the CRTC has obligations to both official languages, as do the government and other federal organizations. When it comes to Radio-Canada, I am convinced, as Hubert Lacroix had said, that the needs of minority language communities and of francophones throughout the country are taken into account.

The CRTC is authorized to monitor what Radio-Canada does regarding official languages, and that component is at the heart of its mandate. It would never have received a licence if it had not made efforts to demonstrate that it was fulfilling its mandate.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nantel.

Mr. Dion, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Madam Minister, Mr. Francis and Mr. Flack.

First I would like to wish you good luck regarding the new developments in your professional life next fall. I may be mistaken, but I believe this is the last time you will be appearing before this committee. I wanted to say that you have my best wishes and I hope you will be very happy.

Hon. Shelly Glover: Thank you.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I would like to go back to what Mr. Nantel was saying about the sale of the Radio-Canada tower.

According to what I understand, as we speak or in the next few days, if this has not been done already, the consortium's proposal will be presented. There is only one consortium involved now, and this is worrying, because it undermines the competition element that could lead to an interesting purchase offer for the tower, both from the perspective of the consortium or from the perspective of Radio-Canada, regarding the sale.

CBC/Radio-Canada has to evaluate the consortium's offer, but this may take all summer. Afterwards, if the offer is accepted, Radio-Canada will negotiate with the City of Montreal to firm up approval of the project, and this could take us to the winter of 2017. A lot of energy is being poured into this.

What is being said at Radio-Canada and elsewhere is that it would be more rational to obtain prior authorization from Treasury Board and the Minister of Canadian Heritage. In other words, once Radio-Canada has done its assessment and determined whether it likes things or not, the government would immediately give its opinion and say whether it agrees with that evaluation. This is not interference, since in the final analysis you will have to give an opinion because this is an expenditure of over \$4 million. This would be a very rational way of doing things, to avoid having the City of Montreal and Radio-Canada spend close to two years negotiating something that may not receive government approval. I think this needs to be determined right from the beginning.

Do you think, as I do, that it would be preferable that your government provide prior authorization in the fall before the City of Montreal and Radio-Canada undertake these negotiations?

• (1600)

Hon. Shelly Glover: First of all, a procedure is in place. You both talked about the details of those negotiations. The government cannot make decisions, actually, without knowing those details. It cannot express an opinion about a request if there is no request. As you said, the consortium is presently in negotiations. At one point, there was more than one consortium. The details of the negotiations are changing. Until the government has received all the information on the matter, it cannot make a decision. Frankly, it would be irresponsible of a government to take a position with letting those involved in the negotiations do their jobs. That is what we are waiting for. As soon as we have all the information, we will come to a decision.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: You will have all the information by the end of the summer. The consortium will have put its offer on the table and the CBC will have considered the offer. Before starting discussions with the city, so that the project fits in with the city's development—and that could take years because we are talking about an entire neighbourhood—the government would be able to grant pre-approval at that point. It is within your power to do that. It is not interference; you will have to decide whether to grant pre-approval or not. My suggestion would be to do so. Do not let the city and the CBC negotiate something that perhaps would not have your support.

Hon. Shelly Glover: I am told that the process is moving forward well. When I have all the details, it will be my responsibility to make a decision. However, I will not do so before I have all those details. I know that the negotiations are going well. There may be changes

before it all comes to my desk. In my opinion, it would be irresponsible to make a decision without having all the details.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Let me suggest this. At the end of the summer, the CBC will decide whether it is accepting the consortium's proposal. You should decide in advance whether or not you will be allowing negotiations with the city, so that people do not waste their time for a couple of years.

Hon. Shelly Glover: Personally, I need to see all the details. It is like saying—

Hon. Stéphane Dion: You will see whether or not you want to grant pre-approval.

Hon. Shelly Glover: Yes, but I cannot approve something in advance if I have not seen it.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I am not asking you to pre-approve anything right now, but I am asking you to agree that it would be reasonable not to let the city and the CBC negotiate for so long, if, from the outset, you do not support the CBC assessment of the consortium's proposal.

Hon. Shelly Glover: I have been told that negotiations are going well. Let them negotiate first.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I think everyone understood.

Hon. Shelly Glover: The information will come to us.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Everyone understood.

So, if I may, I would like to bring up the following point:

[English]

It's about the Confederation celebration. The 2015-16 main estimates indeed mention an envelope of \$16 million. Can we have more details about this \$16 million? I have no other details other than that for now.

Hon. Shelly Glover: Sure. I'm pleased to talk about the 150th, as 2017 will be a time when all Canadians will be able to celebrate where we come from, who we are, and of course the bright future that we hold as Canadians.

When we talk about the money that has been indicated in the documents, it's important to know that much of the funding we've already put out has in fact celebrated or commemorated milestones on the road to 2017.

• (1605)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: The \$16 million is already spent...?

Hon. Shelly Glover: Yes. Well, no. We've had in fact tens of millions of dollars spent through Heritage through our grants and contributions. For example, we did the War of 1812 on the road to 2017. We've done, of course, the 50th of the national flag. We've done the 100th anniversary of World War I, which we are of course celebrating and commemorating over the same period of time that the war lasted. We're also doing the 75th anniversary of World War II. We have the women's suffrage movement, which is coming in 2016.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Has that been through the \$16 million?

Hon. Shelly Glover: This has been through some of the \$16 million, and some of it is through our grants and contributions. The \$16 million will assist us to complete the plans for the road to 2017.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: My concern is the following—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dion.

[*English*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Ah, it's too late for my concerns.

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Weston for seven minutes.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you, Minister, for being here. It takes on a different sort of ambience when we hear that this may be your last appearance at this committee.

Hon. Shelly Glover: Yes.

Mr. John Weston: I get the impression, among other things, that you always worked as hard as anybody in this Parliament, but you seemed to enjoy your department. Whenever I saw you in action, you seemed to be sort of flourishing. I assume you're going to be promoting heritage and culture long after you leave whatever post you're leaving.

Hon. Shelly Glover: Thank you. Absolutely.

Mr. John Weston: Thank you for that.

Before I ask my question, I just want to direct something to my colleague Mr. Dion.

I heard something very nice about a brother of yours in the House today. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister talked about some contribution he's making in Haiti. It didn't surprise me that a brother of yours would be doing something good in a country that needs him. Thank you to your family.

Minister, you're aware of my promotion of health and fitness as something that I think will make our country even stronger and even better. You said two things that were, in one sense, unrelated. You mentioned that sport and physical activity keep us healthy as individuals and members of the community. You also said that on the road to 2017 we will facilitate and support the efforts of Canadians to organize celebrations in their communities.

I'm just wondering if you'd like to elaborate on those two things. Do you see our promoting of health and fitness as part of our 150th legacy? There are so many things you've talked about in your own personal interest as well as your department's interest that are consistent with that.

Hon. Shelly Glover: I absolutely think they are part and parcel of the entire celebration.

I want to thank you, because you have dedicated much of your life to making sure that others understand how important it is to be healthy and active. That dedication really is quite commendable. I myself have been inspired by some of the things you have presented here in Parliament, and I hope you continue that as well. I will always have a place in my heart for heritage, for arts, culture, and sport. After all, I'm Canadian, and that is who we are. That is what makes up the fibre of who we are as a people. I thank you for encouraging me and for making note that this isn't the end for me. This is just another chapter in my life.

With regard to the celebrations themselves, the 150th will involve celebrations from coast to coast to coast. We are encouraging people to make sure that as we celebrate they take into consideration activities that of course our youth would like to be involved in. Well, there is no better activity that youth talk about being involved in than sport, arts, and culture. The kids love it.

I've heard from the consultations we've had. We've had 22 consultations, ministerial consultations, and thousands of online submissions of what people want to see for the 150th. I've seen people suggest canoe trips from community to community. I've seen people talk about using the Trans Canada Trail as a real hub to connect our communities as we celebrate 150 years. There is just idea after idea. I look forward to not only helping to approve some of these wonderful ideas but taking part in them, participating in them, so that when I think back to the 150th anniversary with my grandchildren, I can think about what a great time we had.

If you have any more ideas, you know that I'm always available and I love to hear what you have to offer. Keep doing what you're doing; I want to commend you.

• (1610)

Mr. John Weston: Thank you.

You also mentioned the Pan Am Games coming up, and the FIFA. I have tickets to those. I may be seeing you at some of those matches. That's a different aspect of sport, taking high-performance athletes to inspire people in promoting our heritage. Would you like to elaborate on that aspect as well?

Hon. Shelly Glover: Sure. I remember the feeling we had at the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver. They were just the most inspiring and the most, as we say in French, *rassembleur*. They brought the country together. It really made people proud of who we were.

That is what the Pan Am and Parapan Am Games will do for us again. They are coming up. I know that our parliamentary secretary has a special project for the Pan Am and Parapan Am Games happening in his own riding. We have some legacy projects happening, and the Royal Canadian Henley will be happening in his riding. This will be a tremendous opportunity for Canadians to once again get together and celebrate our best. These are the athletes who train for years, the ones we continue to invest in.

I was at an announcement just last week, a \$16-million announcement for Olympian and Paralympian centres. We have seven centres and institutions across the country who help these athletes get ready. Some of them will be competing at Pan Am and Parapan Am. I watched this young Paralympian triathlete who was training, and I was just in awe. These are some of the finest athletes this country has to offer. We should be very proud of them.

I hope everyone gets tickets, like you and I have, because these are events not to be missed. With FIFA, I really am a soccer fanatic, so I will be taking part. It's just too bad I won't ever get to play. I'm past that age now. I am just looking forward to seeing those women do us proud.

Mr. John Weston: And you'll be getting a picture with Christine Sinclair somewhere along the way.

Hon. Shelly Glover: Oh, yes; I love her.

Mr. John Weston: Thank you.

Hon. Shelly Glover: Thanks.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Nantel, you have five minutes.

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

Madam Minister, allow me to read you the section I was referring to. It is section 48(2) of the Broadcasting Act.

48(2) The Corporation shall not, without the approval of the Governor in Council, enter into (a) any transaction for the acquisition of any real property or the disposition of any real or personal property, other than program material or rights therein, for a consideration in excess of four million dollars or such greater amount as the Governor in Council may by order prescribe; or (b) a lease or other agreement for the use or occupation of real property involving an expenditure in excess of four million dollars or such greater amount as the Governor in Council may by order prescribe.

What I am reading to you is an extract from the act that stipulates that, if the value of the property that the CBC is disposing of exceeds \$4 million, you must become involved.

Now, as my Liberal colleague pointed out a little earlier, you can most certainly become involved beforehand and dig a little to see what is going on. At the moment, what is going on is nothing more nor less than the CBC being dismantled. Everyone can see it; everyone knows it.

But, as Minister of Canadian Heritage, you are not using the power you have to at least see what is going on, what is happening. They are not in the process of getting rid of blinds, they are getting rid of trucks, equipment, costumes, and so on. Let me repeat; you are the Minister of Canadian Heritage. Does it not concern you? This is about our heritage.

Hon. Shelly Glover: First of all, I completely disagree with you.

The CBC receives a billion dollars from our government. That is a lot of money.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: It is \$26 per Canadian.

Hon. Shelly Glover: Here are the facts. The government does not make day-to-day decisions for the CBC.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: That's fortunate!

Hon. Shelly Glover: Frankly, it is the CBC's responsibility to give us details of any sale of \$4 million or more. Then we can decide. But we are not going to meddle in that, or infringe on their rights. Hubert Lacroix has rights too. Do you want to take away those rights?

Mr. Pierre Nantel: No, not at all.

Hon. Shelly Glover: I am not going to do that.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Of course not, but I can well imagine how much it amuses you.

Hon. Shelly Glover: No, I would like to finish.

He has a team that is going through this exercise in the CBC's interest. I am sorry, but no one can say that it is not in their interest. I believe that Hubert Lacroix has his organization and its needs at heart. The CBC no longer needs that space and has a strategic plan for 2020. Parliament has approved it. You were there. So we are letting them get on with their job.

I am going to ask the deputy minister to help us by providing more details.

● (1615)

Mr. Pierre Nantel: We are all ears, Mr. Flack.

Mr. Graham Flack (Deputy Minister, Department of Canadian Heritage): In a technical sense, it is true that all crown corporations are subject to various limits, beyond which they have to ask for Treasury Board approval

In my experience, the typical practice is for crown corporations to make their case, with all the details. That means that no decisions are made in advance. The Treasury Board or the Governor in Council should actually consider all aspects, including the political ones, not just the finances. For example, if the City of Montreal were to decide that a project of that kind was not acceptable because of municipal regulations, that is the kind of thing that the Treasury Board could consider.

So that is so for every case over \$4 million. The request has to be submitted to Treasury Board, but normally that is not done before all the facts and the considerations have been gathered.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you for your very informative answer, Mr. Flack.

I would also like to see the exact total value of the equipment and assets that have been sold off. Right now, it feels like a “for sale” or a “Du Proprio” sign is going right on a building that is part of our heritage. It belongs to all of us. Unfortunately, we know the extent to which the current administration—the Conservative government—has clearly stated on the radio that CBC employees do not share its vision of things.

That is why they are so amused to see that the current system is getting weaker and weaker. That is unacceptable.

Hon. Shelly Glover: I never said that.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Excuse me?

Hon. Shelly Glover: We never said that.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Let me check what the prime minister said, verbatim.

Hon. Shelly Glover: Mr. Nantel, that is a ridiculous thing to say.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Oh, how very respectful of you!

Hon. Shelly Glover: Really, it is ridiculous.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you for calling my comments “ridiculous”, Ms. Glover.

Personally, I find your current behaviour in these heritage issues to be quite unsatisfactory. When you swamped the agenda of the “Let's Talk TV: a Conversation with Canadians”—

[*English*]

The Chair: We're done now. Thank you, Mr. Nantel.

We'll now go to Mr. Hillyer for five minutes, and this will be our last questioner.

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you.

Can you give us a little bit of information about the funding that's been announced for the Manitoba Museum and why you think it's a good investment?

Hon. Shelly Glover: Awesome. Thank you very much.

We, of course, are very fortunate to have some phenomenal museums in Manitoba. A new national museum, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, was opened and I was proud to be there. The Manitoba Museum has been around since I was a child. I love going there, not only for my own enjoyment but also once I had children and now grandchildren. It is one of those places that is a must-see when you're in Manitoba.

They do not have enough space. They want to offer exhibits from across the world. They want to showcase them. They had one, when we announced the funding, about pirates. A large amount of the exhibit in fact could not be displayed because they didn't have enough space. I was proud to announce, on behalf of the Government of Canada, on behalf of Heritage's Canada cultural spaces fund, \$1.175 million so that they could expand and use what's called the Alloway Hall to actually provide more space, which is so desperately needed for this wonderful museum.

They're also going to get some funding for heating and air conditioning. As we all know, it's important that any artifacts that are presented in our museums are acclimatized. We are going to make sure, with the assistance of the Province of Manitoba, which is also providing funds, and of course the Winnipeg Foundation, that they have the tools needed to make sure these exhibits stay safe.

They'll also be getting new sound systems, lighting, those kinds of things. I hope we encourage people to go back again. I've been back so many times over the years. There's always something new. I'm particularly proud of the aboriginal content at the Manitoba Museum. We have a whole area devoted to the Métis. As a proud Métis woman, it's just incredible to walk in and see your history on display.

They recently were able to buy some artifacts, clothing from a hundred years ago that displays the type of artwork our aboriginal peoples were involved in. They're just the finest quality. They've been preserved so well. They're really something to see.

If you ever have a chance to get there, please come visit.

• (1620)

Mr. Jim Hillyer: I will.

Regarding the measures to unbundle cable packages and satellite packages, I'm all in favour of that. I'm in favour of getting rid of the mandatory fee for a bill and stuff like that. At the same time, I'm pretty committed to the principles of the free market. I'm not in favour of, every time we think car prices are too high or food prices are too high, the government stepping in and legislating those high prices away.

As for television providers, there's some justification for our government to get involved in that way. We're not simply in a free market situation with the CRTC-governed companies. Can you just tell us why some free-marketers should be okay with our getting involved in that?

Hon. Shelly Glover: Well, sure. One of the things we want to ensure we have access to is Canadian content. By having some of the licences have some responsibilities towards, for example, French in our minority communities that speak mainly English or English in our minority communities that speak mainly French, these kinds of things are accessible to Canadians through mandatory coverage. We need to continue to do that.

Competition is in fact the best way to provide choice and to help with costs. I too believe that we ought to really encourage competition. I think creativity comes out of that challenge and out of that competition. We want to make sure we get the absolute best quality, not the most. It's not about quantity. It's unfortunate that some people believe in quantity as opposed to quality. For anyone involved in the audiovisual sector, it's a complex sector but I think they appreciate the fact that we stand behind the need to support our Canadian content, like the \$660 million a year we put into it. We also want to invoke competition so that consumers benefit from the best quality and the most choice.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Thank you, Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, for appearing today.

Now I have to move to the votes.

Do we have the unanimous consent of the committee to call all of the votes on the main estimates together?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS

Vote 1—Payments to the Canada Council for the Arts under section 18 of the Canada Council for the Arts Act.....\$182,097,387

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$928,331,798

Vote 5—Working capital.....\$4,000,000

Vote 10—Capital expenditures.....\$105,692,000

(Votes 1, 5, and 10 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$173,741,400

Vote 5—The grants listed in the Estimates and contributions.....\$1,056,279,039

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN MUSEUM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Vote 1—Operating and capital expenditures.....\$21,700,000

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN MUSEUM OF HISTORY

Vote 1—Operating and capital expenditures.....\$83,369,477

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN MUSEUM OF IMMIGRATION AT PIER 21

Vote 1—Operating and capital expenditures.....\$7,700,000

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN MUSEUM OF NATURE

Vote 1—Operating and capital expenditures.....\$26,129,112

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN RADIO-TELEVISION AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$5,379,872

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES OF CANADA

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$83,183,100

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE CORPORATION

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$34,222,719

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

NATIONAL BATTLEFIELDS COMMISSION

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$10,759,494

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

NATIONAL FILM BOARD

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$59,652,377

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

Vote 1—Operating and capital expenditures.....\$35,773,542

Vote 5—Payment to the National Gallery of Canada for the acquisition of objects for the Collection and other costs attributable to this activity.....\$8,000,000

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Vote 1—Operating and capital expenditures.....\$29,754,746

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

TELEFILM CANADA

Vote 1—Payments to Telefilm Canada to be used for the purposes set out in the Telefilm Canada Act.....\$95,453,551

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall the chair report the votes on the main estimates to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We will now briefly suspend.

•(1620) _____ (Pause) _____

•(1630)

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone.

We will call to order this meeting number 40 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

In our second hour today, pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, November 5, 2014, Bill C-597, an act to amend the Holidays Act regarding Remembrance Day, will be studied.

We have as witnesses today Gary Schellenberger, MP for Perth—Wellington; from Canadian Veterans Advocacy, Michael Blais, president and founder; and from the Royal Canadian Legion, Bradley White, Dominion secretary, Dominion Command, and Steven Clark, director of administration, Dominion Command.

We have three groups of witnesses. They will each have eight minutes.

We will hear first from Mr. Schellenberger.

You have the floor.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Chair. Indeed it's a pleasure to be here today in this capacity at this end. I chaired this committee for four years, and I used to sit up there sometimes.

Anyway, thanks for having me, and it's great to be here before this committee today.

I'm here to express some of my concerns with Bill C-597. I'd like to start by expressing my deepest respect to those who have served our country. I regularly meet with veterans and attend commemorative events in my riding. I'm a member of the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 8, in Stratford, and the army and navy. I have a number of friends and family members who have served in our armed forces, and I have been chair of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. It is because of my deep commitment to ensuring that the sacrifices of our veterans are not forgotten that I have some concerns about the impact of this bill.

The main concern I have is one that many others in the veterans community have expressed, that by making Remembrance Day a statutory holiday we risk losing its significance; it will become just another day off. Over time, many people will not bother to remember the purpose of the day, much like what has happened with Victoria Day.

It needs to be recognized that this bill cannot be implemented by the federal government, as the vast majority of employment law is the responsibility of the provinces. If this bill were to pass in its current form, each province would still have the final say on the matter. They would need to amend their labour codes to make it a statutory holiday.

I'm also concerned with the impact on small businesses of requiring them to pay their employees for another statutory holiday. As a former owner of a small business, I allowed any employee unpaid time to go to Remembrance Day ceremonies or to stop and observe two minutes of silence on the job.

It is especially important that our children and youth learn about the sacrifices of our veterans. The governments of Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia believe the best way to do this is to ensure that students are in school observing ceremonies. The federal government should respect their choice.

Last November, when asked about the bill, the president of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 8 in Stratford, Ken Albert, said that when he was young, students used to get the day off to recognize the day but that very few students participated in Remembrance Day activities. He said the Legion was happy when Remembrance Day ceased being a day off. He further stated that he does not think that making it a statutory holiday will bring more people out to cenotaph ceremonies.

I'd like to close by saying that veterans and Legion members in Perth—Wellington regularly thank me for expressing my opposition to making Remembrance Day a statutory holiday. I'm sure that many MPs have heard similar comments from veterans in their ridings.

I have six points that I would like to relay.

Remembrance Day is not a day of leisure. It is a day of remembrance. Anything that takes away from our ability to give thanks for our freedoms and remember the sacrifices made for us is counterproductive.

Currently, many workplaces make allowances on the day and are very understanding of people's desire to take part in remembrance ceremonies in their communities. They take steps to allow people to pay their respects in some way. Most schools either allow classes of children to attend Remembrance Day ceremonies or hold their own assemblies and ceremonies, which involve some excellent work around the act of remembrance. If Remembrance Day were a national holiday, all of these events would either not take place, or would take place in the lead-up to the day. That is counter to the national unity of time and place for all Canadians gathered together at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, all across the country.

As it is now, people make the effort to attend and show their respect, but families could make the choice to do something else on a holiday rather than attend Remembrance Day. If that's what happens, we have failed as legislators to make good on our promise to our veterans that we will all remember them.

● (1635)

Remember July 1 gets moved around all over the place. People want a long weekend. If July 1 comes on a Wednesday, often people work on the Wednesday and move the holiday to the Friday. They forget what it's all about.

With that, I will conclude my remarks and I'll welcome any questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Schellenberger.

We'll now go to Mr. Blais, and you have up to eight minutes.

Mr. Michael Blais (President and Founder, Canadian Veterans Advocacy): Thank you.

Good afternoon, my name is Michael Blais. I am a disabled veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces. I'm the president and founder of the Canadian Veterans Advocacy. I would like to thank you for inviting me to committee today to speak to this issue regarding the Holidays Act to ensure Remembrance Day is never considered a lesser national holiday.

I am a modern veteran as defined by Veterans Affairs Canada and having been injured overseas, having lost friends to war, to peace, and to the scourge of suicide inflicted by mental wounds, the solemn ideals of Remembrance Day are extremely important to me.

When I was a child growing up in Niagara Falls, Ontario, Remembrance Day was a day-off holiday. I remember vividly going to the cenotaph by the falls with my parents to watch the parade. The numbers of World War II and Korean veterans were great as was the attendance of thousands of grateful citizens assembled along the streets and around the cenotaph. These veterans, this solemn act of community remembrance, and the honour in it resonated in me, providing inspiration to me as a young boy and, as I grew into a young man, the understanding that I too should answer the call to national service, to volunteer to serve my nation as did those who proudly marched on the streets of Niagara when I was a child.

I have come here today primarily to speak to the sacred obligation that parliamentarians have to those who tread in harm's way, and by doing so, define the very essence of this bill: the need for formal legislative recognition of national sacrifice and the legislative mandate that I hope you will resolve in an apolitical manner.

I would suggest this is a wonderful opportunity for parliamentarians to embrace this sacred obligation to honour national sacrifice in a significant and meaningful manner. There is so much that we as a nation can do to honour the fallen, the wounded, our veterans, and serving members, but there must be inclusion, recognition, the understanding of national sacrifice. Equally important is the opportunity for Canadians, as I did as a child, to participate in our national services as a family unit to embrace the spirit of the nation as a community, despite the fact that the return of that day off will have to be discussed at the provincial level. I understand that. It is important that the words of the Holidays Act do not demean Remembrance Day.

After we have assembled to honour the fallen on the 11th minute, the 11th hour, after we have said our prayers, laid our poppies at cenotaphs across the nation, a national holiday provides the platform to honour the living, those who have survived the horror of war and peace, and the families of the fallen to ensure they understand that their sacrifice will also be remembered and honoured.

When we break down this bill to its most common denominator, it's fundamentally about respect: respect for the fallen, respect for the wounded, respect for our veterans, and those who serve today in Iraq and in the skies over Syria. These are Canada's sons and daughters. They have volunteered selflessly to serve us, to protect us in war, peace, and national calamity. Let us collectively and with sincerity demonstrate our respect by fixing the Holidays Act to ensure Remembrance Day, already a national holiday, continues to honour their service and sacrifice. They have done their duty for us; let us do our duty to honour them.

To that end I would respectfully ask all parliamentarians to place political ideology aside and avail themselves of the opportunity to honour Canada's sons and daughters by submitting this legislation that will bring to Remembrance Day, arguably our most important national holiday, the respect it deserves and give veterans the respect they deserve.

Thank you.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Blais.

We'll now go to Mr. White and Mr. Clark. You have up to eight minutes between you.

Mr. White, you have the floor.

Mr. Bradley K. White (Dominion Secretary, Dominion Command, Royal Canadian Legion): Thank you.

Honourable Chairman and members of the committee, good afternoon and thank you for the invitation to appear before you today on behalf of the Royal Canadian Legion on Bill C-597.

On behalf of our Dominion president, Comrade Tom Eagles, and our 300,000 members, it is our pleasure to be here.

I am Brad White. I'm the Dominion secretary of the Royal Canadian Legion. I arrived at the Legion in 1998 and I've been involved in just about every major commemorative activity that the Legion has been engaged in, as well as being the director of the national Remembrance Day ceremony.

Accompanying me today is Steven Clark. He is my director of administration and he is now the director of the national ceremony.

I will be speaking against the proposed amendment to Bill C-597 to make November 11 a legal holiday.

The Legion's activity work related to Remembrance Day dates back to our inaugural Dominion Convention in 1926 when we first proposed to the government that Armistice Day be observed on the 11th of November rather than on the Monday in the week in which that date fell. The advocacy was successful and resulted in the Armistice Day act amendment in 1931. In the ensuing years, Remembrance Day has been incorporated into the Holidays Act and is a federally recognized holiday for all federal offices and federally regulated employees. While this is not binding on the provinces, some jurisdictions have followed suit.

The Legion's position on this issue is our concern that Canadians, if given the time off as a legal holiday, will not take the time to remember. It may simply become another long weekend or mid-week break. This position was most recently reinforced by our national delegates at our national convention in 2012. It is paramount that the significance of Remembrance Day be inculcated in our youth and the general population to show their respect for the sacrifices of our fallen.

To honour this day, many schools hold assemblies where they organize their own commemoration. Others take their students to participate in ceremonies at local cenotaphs, thereby strengthening the impact of the significance of the 11th of November. The Legion works very closely with schools throughout the country to provide an educational component to Remembrance Day. In addition to welcoming classes at our ceremonies, we also have a very well-renowned teachers' guide on our website. It is an excellent teaching facility and a tool, and it has been downloaded more than a million times from our website.

So too are we encouraged to hear of organized commemorations in workplaces on the 11th of November. We need to make honouring and remembering an important part of our regular routine on that day and not simply provide a day off from school or work. We need only to look at Victoria Day, a legal holiday, to question what observances are being held across the country to honour Canada's longest-serving monarch. For most, it provides a long weekend in May. We must not let Remembrance Day suffer the same fate.

In regard to the half-masting of the Canadian flag on the 11th of November, it is the current policy to half-mast the flag on all federal buildings in Canada from sunrise to sunset. With respect to the Peace Tower, provision exists to half-mast the Canadian flag at 11 a.m. on the 11th of November, which coincides with the start of the two minutes of silence during the national Remembrance Day ceremony.

It remains in that position until sunset. It is our position that this current practice should remain unchanged and intact.

We thank you again for giving us this opportunity to provide our comments on Bill C-597.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to questions, and we'll go to Mr. Clarke for seven minutes.

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for coming, and Gary, one of our colleagues, as well.

I'm really torn on this. For myself, when I was a kid, both my parents were Legion members. They both served in the air force. My father was a Legion president in Gibsons, British Columbia, then also in Slocan, where I still have Legion membership. My mom was the ladies auxiliary president as well. When the Legions were actually being built in the small communities of Slocan and Gibsons, I saw that they were paramount for the veterans. I remember as a five-year-old and six-year-old participating in Remembrance Day but also marching. My parents taught me how to march using the drum to lead the parade. A lot of my friends, through participating, got to know what actually transpired.

For myself, I joined the RCMP when I was 22 and served in the force for over 18 years. Being in the RCMP, I would attend the Remembrance Day ceremony. My detachment commander would ask members who would want to go, and I always wanted to go. I wanted to remember my family's contributions, my grandfathers', my brother's, in serving overseas. Having lived in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, where it is delegated not as a national stat but where everyone doesn't have to go to work, I don't look at it like that at all. I look at it as a day of remembrance.

Back on July 7, 2006, as detachment commander in Spiritwood, Saskatchewan, at 9:24 I faced the worst fear of any policeman's duty: a 10-33 call. It means an officer needs assistance. Shots were fired. Three of my members were shot and two passed away, right in my own detachment. Nothing is worse than having to go to a loved one's house, having to go to your neighbour's, an RCMP colleague's house, to tell them that their husband has just been shot.

So I'm really torn on this, because I look at it not as a holiday; I look at it as remembering, remembering those who fall. Whenever I give a speech, I talk about Marc Bourdages and Robin Cameron. These are the two members who fell and gave their lives trying to serve and protect Canadians in Canada. Police officers in Canada and people who wear the uniform and serve in the military know the risks. They know the challenges that face them if they do serve overseas. It's a well-known risk and everyone accepts that risk. If the Maker says it's your time to go, it's your time to go.

I'm listening to the Legion, to you, Steven, and you, Bradley, talking about the Legion. I remember as a kid going to the Legion meetings, going to the functions, going at Christmas and listening to the veterans talk about their participation overseas, going to Remembrance Days, and listening to the veterans there talk. The best knowledge we have is when the Legion opens its doors to the general public and they talk about what's going on, they talk about the challenges they faced or what they saw. It's one of the only times they ever talk, because it's their own environment. It's their own little community where they actually feel safe. They'll take a young child and bring them into a small room, and then the young child there will ask questions for everybody. I feel that at times that's probably the best way for some of the veterans actually to heal. I suffer from PTSD, but the more I talk about it the better I feel.

We talk about consultation. We talk about groups. You were talking in regard to Legions across the country. I belong to Branch 276 in Slocan, and I get a lot of mail. I get a lot of recommendations. I've never once seen any type of letter to the membership asking the membership what they feel or how they feel about a national holiday.

● (1650)

People say, "We stood up and we did this consultation." Did you keep track of all the members who were asked? That's all I ask. That's probably the best way to go about it, by asking each Legion member or associate member how they feel about a national holiday. We hear about dollars and cents and how this is going to affect the economy. I don't think that's right. People put their lives in jeopardy and give up their lives to protect our country and other countries abroad. That's how I personally feel.

Mr. Bradley K. White: I am a third-generation military person, and I also spent a lot of time in Legions with my grandfather when I was a young child. I have two sons currently serving in the RCMP. You asked whether we ask or consult our members about how our policy is supposed to be formed. We do. Through the policy formation of the organization, branches actually raise those issues we're talking about today, and they're voted on at the national convention. The last time we did this, the matter was raised in 2012. This is not the first time it's been raised over the years, so we do consult our people all the way through.

As a serving member of the Canadian Forces, on Remembrance Day I would go to my child's school where I would give a presentation in French to the whole assembly of 600 people who would be gathered around. There would be other members of the Canadian Forces who would do the same thing at that time. There are still a lot of members of the Canadian Forces who are out in schools today.

Is the message of remembrance getting through? We hope it is, because we, as a nation, have a duty to remember those who have made sacrifices on our behalf.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to Mr. Harris for seven minutes.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, everyone, for coming today. I think we can all agree that we want to find the best way to honour our veterans and their

sacrifice. I think we all have different opinions about how best to do that.

I want to start off with a quick question for Mr. Schellenberger.

Of course, yours was one of the two "nay" votes at second reading, and I want to thank you for that because I have often been a holder of minority opinions. Sometimes they're not the most popular things, but it's always good to have those differences of opinion out there.

You raised the question about how, if it becomes a holiday, some of the meaning could be lost. However, one of your colleagues at the last meeting here, Scott Armstrong, said that in Nova Scotia, when they brought in the Remembrance Day Act, they actually saw attendance at ceremonies go up. I think that part of the discussion about whether it should be a statutory holiday in each province would be better had by the provinces themselves. Currently it is a holiday in six provinces and three territories. It isn't in Ontario and Quebec, and Manitoba has gone in its own direction and businesses have to be shut down until one. Nova Scotia has its own Remembrance Day Act.

Do you think it's possible, perhaps, that we could actually see attendance at ceremonies go up if people have the time available?

● (1655)

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Over the last 12 years that I've been a member of Parliament, on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, I've gone to Stratford. I've been to at least 12 wreath-laying ceremonies there. I go to Stratford primarily because it's my biggest municipality. I go to other ceremonies too, sometimes on weekends or on that particular day but a little bit later.

Remembrance Day doesn't always fall on a weekday. It falls on weekends. Often, on Saturdays and Sundays, you don't have as many people out to the ceremonies as you would have during the week. I don't know why that is, but I have observed that.

I have gone many times to assemblies. At one school, Stratford Central Secondary School, before the service on Remembrance Day, 900 students assemble and they put on a wonderful tribute, a wonderful remembrance. I can guarantee you that if it were a statutory holiday, 75% to 80% of those students would be at home, either in bed or doing something else on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.

Mr. Dan Harris: It's certainly a possibility, and going back to the parents, if they believe, I think it would be their responsibility to get them out of bed. Of course, if Remembrance Days falls on the weekend, do you think fewer Stratford folks go? The schools do their ceremonies the day before, typically, so I don't think we would lose that. Certainly that's what happens in schools where it is a statutory holiday.

Quickly, Mr. White, you said that you go to your child's school on the 11th day to partake in sharing your experiences. If the ceremonies in the schools were the day before, would you not be able to go to the school and then also go to the ceremonies? Wouldn't that enhance your own remembrance?

Mr. Bradley K. White: I would. There's no doubt about it. I would go to the schools and make a presentation to the schools. I think what the issue comes down to is the concept of service and how we recognize service. A lot of us in this room have served. We have gone to different places. We understand the significance of remembrance. I would say that in the country right now we've seen a growth in remembrance. Since about the year 2000, each year the national ceremony seems to be getting bigger. There is a resurgence of remembrance.

However, those people who really work at remembrance are in a minority, so if you gave the majority a day off, I would say that the majority might take advantage of that and not put any sort of significance towards the remembrance aspect. There are people who are in the minority, like us, who continue to promote the aspects of remembrance.

Mr. Dan Harris: In that respect, I think those are the folks we should be focusing on in order to give everyone the opportunity to go and pay their respects. For any holiday we create, for any reason, many people are going to use it for different purposes, unfortunately, and that's the reality with every other holiday that exists.

I want to move on to Mr. Blais, because I'll be running out of time and I have a couple of questions I want to ask.

First, you mentioned honouring the living. I wanted to ask you to elaborate on that. Also, despite the fact that this bill does not create a day off in the provinces that don't have it as such, I think it likely has the potential to spark a debate, as we saw last November, about doing just that. In provinces such as Ontario, for example, our province, if Ontario did eventually decide to reinstate this day off, do you feel that it would encourage Canadians to embrace the spirit, as you say, or would they simply stay at home and play video games?

Mr. Michael Blais: I think the spirit is alive and well, and that after 12 years of vicious combat in Afghanistan and 158 trips down the Highway of Heroes, that spirit is very strong.

I say "honour the living", as you know, and I mentioned that when we take our poppies off we've fulfilled our obligation to the dead. But there are still people out here who are lacking limbs, minds, and souls, and who deserve respect. I believe in my heart that the nation will rally, that we can provide.... For example, in hockey we have six NHL teams here. We can make Remembrance Day stretch. From two o'clock in the afternoon.... Be respectful and let the veterans go with their friends and have lunch, but at two o'clock it starts, and every veteran in that community, whether it's NHL, whether it's AHL, whether it's your local B team, it doesn't matter, because we're bringing those veterans forward in Iraq with your kids and my kids.

This is where the spirit lives. We have basketball.... We could offer movies for free for veterans and stuff, but most important—and I believe this—we mentioned parents. Where are the parents of Canada's children today? Why do they not have the right to do like I wanted to do, which is to take their child out of school and enrich him or her and expose him or her to the experience of standing at that cenotaph and watching grown men cry in remembering their friends and feeling the spirit of the nation rise?

I think we're missing the boat. We're complaining that there won't be any people showing up. That's not the point. The point is respect:

respect and to pay that respect. As a community, we can rally to extraordinary levels. There's so much opportunity. If Veterans Affairs Canada took the lead on this and, instead of putting on rinky-dink commercials about going to work, put on commercials about sacrifice, about encouraging professional sports teams to embrace this concept every Remembrance Day, bringing out the nation as a whole, unified, proud, and free, I would suggest to you that the spirit in the nation would be alive and well for this generation, the next generation, and every generation forward from that time.

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you.

On that note, we will now go to Mr. Valeriote for seven minutes.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, gentlemen, for attending before the committee today.

I'm on the veterans affairs committee. I have been for approximately a year, and a member of the Legion for the past many years. I come from a community that spends a lot of time honouring the men and women who gave their lives for our freedom, our democracy, and those who came home to tell their stories.

In fact, we attend a rather moving ceremony every November 11, and other days as well but particularly November 11, in our Sleeman Centre. I'm told it's among the best commemorations in Canada and it is the efforts of our Legion, frankly, that make it so successful. Without them there would be no commemoration that would nearly match what happens on Remembrance Day in Guelph.

Having said that, there is no amount of commemoration that we can give to our soldiers, fallen or those who return. There is no amount of compensation that we can give them, not adequate compensation, for any of the injuries they suffered, whether it be mental or physical. So in my mind anything we can do to raise the profile of Remembrance Day is a good thing.

At our last committee meeting, in my review of some of the notes that have been sent to me by the Library of Parliament, I am advised and I believe—and I'm going to address some of the legal consequential aspects of this legislation—that notwithstanding the words "legal holiday" in the legislation, that does not mean "statutory holiday". It does not mean a day off. In fact, when I look at the Library of Parliament statement that I received, it says, "The Holidays Act does not entitle employees to a day off with pay". This is done through other legislation or regulation; notably, provincial legislation. This act does not require the provinces to look at this legislation and have them consider making it a statutory holiday.

In effect what the bill does is raise the profile of Remembrance Day without making it a statutory holiday.

You indicated, Mr. White, that the Legion was opposed to the legislation largely because of that, and I don't disagree with you. The people I've talked to at the Legion in Guelph and many other people in Guelph who are non-Legion members are concerned about it being a statutory holiday for the many reasons that have been discussed around this table.

If you were satisfied that this does not create a statutory holiday but merely raises the profile as a legal holiday so that it is considered no less a national holiday than any other holiday, as Mr. Blais said, would that allay your concerns and would you say, in that case, "Let's get this legislation passed as quickly as possible"?

• (1705)

Mr. Bradley K. White: Legally or otherwise—we can play with words—you give Canadians the average sort of indication that this is now a holiday, then they take it as a holiday. They don't look at the Library of Parliament to have a definition of what is or what is not implied by the terminology of being legal or statutory.

The position that we present comes from our members and is voted on democratically at our organization in our meetings and our conventions, so we portray that.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Blais, let me ask you. If you knew that it did not necessitate the statutory holiday, the entitlement to not go to work or go to school, if it did not produce that result, that was not the consequence, and it, as you said, raised the profile as a national holiday without the statutory absence from work or school, would you encourage the passage of this bill as quickly as possible?

Mr. Michael Blais: Absolutely, and I believe that there will come a time in this nation when all provinces will embrace the concept of the national holiday for it and it will be statutory at that level. But I understand, and you must understand, that what we're doing today, while it may not have the statutory things that I would love to see, it does provide advocates like myself who work on a provincial level the tools to move forward to convince these legislatures that these arguments are moot. They have no place here.

We're talking about wounded men and women and paying respect at a national level, and working—

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Thank you, Mr. Blais. I have another question for Mr. Schellenberger; I only have so much time.

Mr. Schellenberger, you expressed concern about it being a statutory holiday. We were advised at committee in our last meeting, and from the Library of Parliament, that a legal holiday in no way means a statutory holiday. It does not compel anyone to relieve their employees of going to work or any school board anywhere in Canada from relieving their students of attending school.

Knowing that, would you not think—given that this will heighten the profile of Remembrance Day without creating a statutory holiday from work or school—that this bill should be supported then as quickly as possible and moved through this House?

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: With all of the regulation you've just been talking about or those types of things, I'm going to give you a bit of an analogy of what goes on. Whatever the rules are don't always qualify....

We have a very prominent veteran in Stratford by the name of Art Boon. He is a D-Day veteran. He's been honoured by the French. He's been honoured now by the Dutch. Holland has invited him to the special occasion to celebrate the liberation of Holland.

He is 82 or some years old. He needs a caregiver to go with him. He has suggested that his son, a schoolteacher, go with him for those six days. That schoolteacher asked for six days off with no pay to go

with his father to Holland to celebrate this great occasion and to celebrate his father's great gift, which he's not only given to the Dutch but to us here in Canada. He's been denied. The school board won't give him six days off to go to the commemoration.

I think this is what happens. It doesn't matter what your regulation is, these are the types of things that happen.

I have to say before I conclude this little part that it's very strange. This is the first time I've been recognized as Gary Ralph Schellenberger in a committee—any place. I have signs all over the place. My father was Ralph Schellenberger, a veteran of the Second World War.

It's wonderful. Thank you.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Valeriote, and thank you, Mr. Schellenberger.

We're now going to move to Mr. Young for seven minutes.

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. White, as a brief introduction, I struggled with this issue as a member of provincial Parliament. I think the year was 1997. We discussed this same issue in a private member's bill: should Remembrance Day be an official holiday with time off for everybody or stay as it was?

The paramount constituency, at least for me, was veterans, people who have put their lives on the line for others. I talked to them face to face and they gave me the same message then as you're giving us today, which is to leave it as it is and have the children in school. Many of my veterans go in to talk to the children, and they have found that very valuable. They thought that was meaningful.

I wonder if you could expand on your remarks. You have 330 Legions that you represent. How did you communicate with them to get mutual agreement on the issue?

Mr. Bradley K. White: Mr. Clark is along with me, and I think I'll let him answer this question.

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you. That would be great.

Mr. Steven Clark (Director of Administration, Dominion Command, Royal Canadian Legion): Thanks very much.

With regard to the process that we follow for making democratic decisions within the Legion, as Mr. White said, everything originates with our local branches. We are very much a bottom-up organization. They are the ones who develop the policies that will eventually get enacted and voted upon and put into practice on a national level.

The process that would follow, and has followed on numerous occasions in the past, is that a branch, with the support of their members, would make the recommendation that perhaps Remembrance Day be recognized as a statutory holiday or not. That would get passed through their provincial command and eventually make it to our Dominion Convention.

At that time, the representatives at the convention, who represent branches from all across the country, have an opportunity to vote on what an individual branch has decided. Based on that decision, that policy is then adopted and put into practice.

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you very much.

Mr. Schellenberger, I imagine that the last thing our veterans would want is a division amongst Canadians on this issue. Unfortunately, I'm not finding any consensus on it.

I do want to ask, with some hesitation, about the cost to business, because of that issue, because of resentment. If businesses are losing money, I wouldn't want there to be any resentment. When Family Day was introduced in 2009 in Ontario, the figure was that it would cost businesses \$2 billion. Have you studied that issue at all, and do you have any comments on that?

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: When I was in small business, I never talked in the millions; I talked in the thousands. What would the cost be? I know when I ran my business a number of years ago, for every three employees I had to have the fourth to cover the overhead for my employees. That's roughly where the cost would come in.

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you.

Mr. Blais, I've done a straw poll on the Internet. I have my own newspaper online that I send to quite a large number of my constituents. I sent out the question, with one paragraph each way, and I just asked them to send me a note in reply. It's roughly 50-50 on this issue at this point, so I don't have a consensus. But I think everyone in this room agrees with you that there should be formal recognition that is significant and meaningful. I wonder if you have any ideas. If the bill doesn't pass, are there other ways that there can be formal recognition, which is significant and meaningful, without it being a day off from work for everyone?

Mr. Michael Blais: We speak to respect again. I hate bringing up that word.

The Chair: One moment, we have a point of order.

Mr. Harris.

Mr. Dan Harris: Sorry, I let it go the first few times, but we've all agreed here that this doesn't create a day off or a statutory holiday. Mr. Young in particular has repeatedly implied that it would. I would just ask that he keep to the bill itself and not stray, implying something incorrect, which is that this would create a day off.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Young.

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you, Chair.

Can you answer that question, Mr. Blais, and also answer, in reference to the point just made, which wasn't really a point of order, what would be the point of making it a statutory holiday if businesses didn't close?

Mr. Michael Blais: Let's break it down again. What we are doing here is important, not in the sense of a statutory—

• (1715)

Mr. Frank Valeriote: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Valeriote, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Frank Valeriote: I'm sorry—and this went on in the last committee meeting as well—there's a constant misleading of witnesses that this creates a day off and it does not create a day off.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Valeriote, but I'm going to rule that's a point of debate and—

Mr. Frank Valeriote: No, it's not, Mr. Chair. We agreed at the last meeting, and it's in the notes that have been sent to us from the library. It's not a point of debate; it's a point of fact.

The Chair: I'm going to rule that it's a point of debate.

Mr. Young, you have the floor, and you stopped at about five minutes and 10 seconds.

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you.

Mr. Blais, would you like to go ahead or should I repeat the question?

Mr. Michael Blais: No, the point is that we're here for a reason. You have an obligation at the federal level. You can fulfill that obligation quite easily without jeopardizing statutes or laws or anything. You can raise that national level. On a secondary level, that's a provincial statutory issue that we have to deal with. While the other organizations may feel it's fine, I do not. I consult, period. We are completely based on consultation. I talked to the older veterans, and you're right, there is division there. They don't understand. But I also talk to many veterans who served not in my time, but the time after that time, and those who have offered great sacrifice, and many feel that their government is not honouring that sacrifice.

I truly believe this is your opportunity. Embrace it.

Mr. Terence Young: I understand, and you made that case passionately and I listened carefully. Is there some other way to provide formal recognition that is significant and meaningful?

Mr. Michael Blais: At a parliamentary level, no, there's not. This is about you. This is about Parliament, the 308 parliamentarians sitting in the House of Commons. This is about your fulfilling your obligation to those who have done their duty for you.

We talked about this and that and small businesses, yada, yada, yada. It's not important. What is important is that we fulfill the obligation at this level.

Mr. Terence Young: Mr. Chair, is there any time?

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds left.

Mr. Clarke, do you have a quick question?

Mr. Rob Clarke: I have one question with regard to the membership. There's a difference between associate members, those who are the ones who haven't served, and regular members, who have served in the military or in the RCMP. How many people attended your annual general meeting? I'd just like to know those numbers. That's where the big difference can be. You're going to have people making decisions who haven't served, who don't understand the sacrifices that have taken place.

Mr. Bradley K. White: On an average basis...okay? What I'll explain to you is that the ordinary member, like me, has served in the Canadian Forces or the RCMP. Normally, the largest group of the membership are called associate members. Those are the family members of those who have served. Those who haven't served are called affiliates.

The Chair: I'm sorry, we're going to have to move on.

Right now we're going to go back to Mr. Harris for five minutes.

Mr. Dan Harris: Thank you very much.

Going back to Mr. Blais, the Legion has come out as opposed to this bill. I was very disappointed that in the eight months leading up to my introducing this bill in Parliament, every single one of my calls to Dominion Command went unanswered. We tried several different people.

Do you have any thoughts about the Legion's opposition to this bill?

Mr. Michael Blais: It's not really my place, but I do. I think you're missing a valiant opportunity here at a Legion level to embrace the spirit of the nation, to stand forth. If I were Dominion president and you passed this bill, the first thing I would do is send in a letter to all my branch presidents saying we're going to embrace Remembrance Day this year. I want you to invite those kids. I want you to invite the RCMP detachments. I want you to invite your local militia regiments, and have trucks and things for kids to see, and feel, and breathe, and smell. That's where we go. That's a wonderful opportunity but it's being lost.

Mr. Dan Harris: Just to get some clarity on this bill, because even after I asked him not to Mr. Young implied that it created a day off, Mr. White, do you understand that this does not in fact create a day off?

Mr. Bradley K. White: As I mentioned to you before, you can use any of the terminology you want to. As soon as you say a holiday—

Mr. Dan Harris: Sir, it's a simple yes or no.

Mr. Bradley K. White: I'm going to say no.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Chair, on a point of order, I don't mind Mr. Harris being direct in wanting to get a response to his questions, but we have witnesses we've invited to come here. I think they should be treated with the proper decorum and respect that they deserve, whether they are in favour or not in favour of the issue.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Harris.

Mr. Dan Harris: That sounded like debate to me.

We've just heard that the Legion says no to that question, so it was actually very important to ask that question because now we understand a little bit better that they don't understand that this does not in fact create a day off. That's a serious problem. We have the largest veterans' organization in the country that doesn't understand that this change does not in fact create a day off. I would say that actually taints the discussions, perhaps, that they've been having.

I'd like to ask, in 2012, when it came up at the national, and the question was raised, were there large regional divisions within the Legion? My understanding is that in many regions within the country the Legion actually supports this and the members support it. Other times that this bill or similar versions of this bill have been brought forward, it's actually been at the behest of some local Legions. Do you know if there are local or regional divisions with respect to who does and doesn't support it within the Legion?

Mr. Bradley K. White: I think that in any democratic organization, as we see in Parliament today, there are regional differences and divisions. The Legion is very much the same thing as what Parliament is. We have our regional differences. We have our regional issues. When these issues are debated, they're debated on those types of issues. Some people support; some people don't. At the bottom line of it the majority decides, and that's what a democracy's all about. We respect that decision and that vote.

Mr. Dan Harris: Was it presented as whether it would be a statutory holiday or not? Is that how it was presented to vote?

Mr. Bradley K. White: Yes, it was.

Mr. Dan Harris: Now I'll ask again, does this bill create a statutory holiday so that all Canadians would have the day off?

Mr. Bradley K. White: That would be unclear to me.

Mr. Dan Harris: The Library of Parliament said very clearly that it doesn't. We've said very clearly that it doesn't. I'm not sure where that confusion lies then, because it certainly isn't unclear to me. I'm the one who presented this bill.

Of course, even today there was a question about half-masting, which of course we've already said we want to remove from the bill to leave that flexibility there, so I was actually surprised it got raised.

Mr. Schellenberger, you're clear that this bill does not create a statutory holiday, correct?

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: I respect the Library of Parliament, but what I'm saying, and I said it before and I'll say it again, is that whether it's a statutory holiday or it's not a statutory holiday, people will make it what they want. I watch that every July 1 when the celebrations are going on. It seems the same people every year celebrate Canada Day, and the same people work on that day if it's a Wednesday or a Thursday to take Friday and have a long weekend. This is what will happen to this thing.

I have to say one thing. A question was asked—

Mr. Dan Harris: Sorry. It was a quick question about whether you understood that it did—

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: I talk in parables.

Mr. Dan Harris: That's okay. We're politicians.

Mr. White, would you go back to the membership now that you know it wouldn't become a statutory holiday?

The Chair: Mr. Harris, on that note, we are now going to move to Mr. Clarke for five minutes—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: I stand corrected. Mr. Dykstra, you have the floor.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: I just want to be clear. It's part of the reason we have committee. It allows us to debate in a very fulsome way whether or not we should move forward on a particular piece of legislation or clauses within that legislation.

I find it strangely ironic that the mover of the bill is actually asking whether you know or understand that this would or would not lead to a statutory holiday. It would seem to me, if I were moving a piece of legislation, that I would have to take responsibility for you not being aware of what my bill did or didn't do, so I'm not so sure the responsibility for understanding whether or not it's a statutory holiday falls on Mr. White's shoulders or Mr. Clark's shoulders. I would submit that understanding comes from you, the government that moves a piece of legislation, or from a private member who introduces his own legislation.

While I find it interesting and I have learned a lot here this afternoon about that particular piece of legislation, I want to go back to the points all three of you were making with respect to intent. I think that's what you were trying to describe whether, like Mr. Blais, you're in favour of the bill, or like Mr. Schellenberger, Mr. White, or Mr. Clark, you are not in favour of the bill. You're speaking to what you believe to be the intent of the bill.

I think it would be helpful for all four of you to tell us what you believe the intent of the bill is, and why it's difficult for your organization, in the case of Mr. White and Mr. Clark, to support the bill, and why, Mr. Blais, your organization....

I was a little hesitant when you said you believed veterans didn't necessarily understand the issue and that, therefore, you speak on their behalf. I wondered why you would refer to your own membership that way. I want to give the two organizations the opportunity to speak more to the intent of the bill, and to why, in the case of the Legion, members don't support the bill and why Mr. Blais' organization does.

• (1725)

Mr. Michael Blais: Thank you.

First of all, for my part, there were no ambiguities on what this bill was bringing forward. I never thought the statutory conversation would be happening here, quite frankly, because it was clear to me what this bill was about when Mr. Harris brought it forward, just as it was clear to me as we presented it to our membership or through the consultation period.

We understand exactly what this is. It's an opportunity for Parliament to fulfill their sacred obligation without the risk of running statutory holidays and all the conversation we had. It's very simple and I suggest we all keep it simple.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thank you.

Mr. White.

Mr. Bradley K. White: I'm going to start and then I'll hand it off to Steven quickly.

The intent of any legislation, whatever it's going to be, should be to put forward to all Canadians the issues of sacrifice and remembrance, and the respect they have for their veterans and people who serve their country, whether they be members of the Canadian Forces, members of the RCMP, or members of emergency services.

Steven.

Mr. Steven Clark: When you designate Remembrance Day as a legal holiday according to the Holidays Act, you put it on the same status as Canada Day and Victoria Day. I think it follows that it would be treated as a statutory holiday, much as these two days already are. If you treat it the same way, the intent would be that it would become a statutory holiday, and I would hate to see having to designate Remembrance Day as a legal holiday as the means to increase the visibility or importance of the day. I don't think a designation is going to change that.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Blais, how many members are in your organization?

Mr. Michael Blais: We don't field members. We're a director-based organization on purpose. I do not believe in charging disabled and wounded veterans or their families a membership fee for services that I feel are a duty. We have three directors. We're dedicated to effecting legislative change on areas such as this, more importantly, the lump sum award and the more serious issues that are confronting veterans, but that's the way it is. We're registered, non-federal. We followed all the government's rules as far as I—

Mr. Rick Dykstra: That's great.

I had one more question in that regard. You don't have a membership per se, so how did you consult specifically on this issue—

Mr. Michael Blais: We're very active.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: —if you don't have a membership, how do you talk for the organization? Because I don't think you're going to have enough time to respond here, could you provide to the committee in writing how you consult with your organization to get a perspective on this?

Mr. Michael Blais: Sure. I don't have to give it to you in writing. I'm consulting almost every day. I spoke to four veterans this morning. Two of them are visiting here today. We are very active on Facebook and social networking and all that, but it's the personal interaction that I engage in, whether they phone me, or I engage them in person in my travels. I understand—

Mr. Rick Dykstra: How many people in your organization would you feel you spoke to about this issue?

• (1730)

Mr. Michael Blais: Remembrance Day? I would note that...I think her name's Wilma McNeill. She reached out to me a couple of years ago on the provincial level. It hasn't been a high priority because your government sets the priorities for us and with the level of discord the veterans are confronting, Remembrance Day is down the list. We have veterans suffering catastrophic injuries and pain who have been abandoned through this lack of action on the new veterans charter.

Back to answering your question—

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Do you know how many members—

The Chair: We're well over time now, I'm sorry.

Mr. Michael Blais: To answer your question—

The Chair: I hate to cut anybody off. We will have some more meetings on this bill.

I want to thank our witnesses for attending today. Thank you for your input.

On that note, the meeting is adjourned.

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