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**Mr. Rob Anders**

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## Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

Wednesday, September 20, 2006

• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC)):** Greetings. We are back at it again, ladies and gentlemen, with the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

Today I think we're just going to be talking about some of the business we'll be conducting over the next little while, just so everybody knows what the itinerary is and where we're going with things.

I'm briefly going to go over some of the things we have here for future business. One is, of course, that we determined prior to our summer break that we were going to be looking into the veterans bill of rights, the veterans independence program, and kind of fleshing out the veterans ombudsman and the role there. As well, we do have some issues with regard to upcoming travel. I know you talked previously about St. Anne's Hospital, for example, in Montreal, and some other locations, possibly, within Canada. As well, I believe there is something that will be coming up in France.

Lastly, I want to remind everybody that we did get a request from people in the Russian Federation, our counterparts with veterans affairs there, to come and present to us.

As well, we have a list of witnesses who have indicated they would like to appear, and some potential witnesses. I have a copy, but it has not been translated, so we'll have to present that list of witnesses at a subsequent meeting, next week, unless the committee members wish to discuss those things now.

I'm going to open it up, then, if people want to have any discussion with regard to some of these items at all or any things they want to introduce into the agenda, aside from that, for future discussion.

One of the things we want to make sure everybody understands is that the Russian delegation will be appearing on October 4. I imagine it's not dissimilar to situations where sometimes, when our parliamentary committees go on travel, we look to meet with our counterparts in other countries. They've requested that of us. I'm trying to remember exactly when it was—prior to the summer, anyhow. So I think that explains that.

Mr. St. Denis.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, Lib.):** Totally unrelated to the agenda, I just want to give regrets in advance that I will probably miss a couple of meetings next week. Two of the four soldiers killed four days ago were from my riding.

It's an amazing coincidence: two people, from two villages less than ten kilometres apart in my riding, who quite independently ended up one in Shilo and the other in Petawawa, then subsequently ended up in Afghanistan in the same spot, where the suicide bomber killed them, civilians, including children, and two other soldiers. That has just happened, so I don't know, but there will be a couple of funerals next week that I will want to attend. I'll make sure I have a substitute here. I wish you well in your deliberations in the meantime. It will be a new experience for me.

**The Chair:** Fair enough. I think it's very commendable that you're attending.

We're just taking a bit of a list, so—

**Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** I just want to comment.

Would you please be kind enough to extend the condolences of this entire committee to the families of the lost soldiers? We appreciate very much the sacrifice they've made.

Please give them our very best regards.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** I'll do that.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Hinton, and then over to Mr. Valley.

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ):** On the same subject—

**The Chair:** All right, Mr. Perron.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** If you want to put forward a motion that we send committee condolences for Brent's two constituents who died, we could proceed with that immediately, Betty. We would have an official motion, and our chair could write a letter and give it to you. It would be something official from the committee. I have no doubt that you will pass on our condolences, but you could also give them a letter.

[English]

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** If that was the committee's wish, for sure, whether it was in a motion or a letter or verbally. I would be glad to convey whatever the message was...and I appreciate Gilles' intervention. Whatever the committee would like, of course.

**The Chair:** I think it probably would have more gravity if there were a motion passed in committee. The question now is the wording.

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** And a letter written by you guys.

**The Chair:** Absolutely. Of course.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** The motion could be a simple motion instructing the chair to write the letter, then you can use the wording... You would certainly have our agreement on whatever wording was appropriate.

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** You move the motion; I'll second it.

**The Chair:** Okay, we have a motion on the floor. Is there any debate on the motion at all? No?

I'll call the question then.

(Motion agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** Thank you, colleagues. We'll take care of that for you.

**The Chair:** Now on to Mr. Valley.

**Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.):** Thank you.

I have a question about past travel. A number of us had an opportunity to join the minister when he travelled right after the House broke. I was unable to do it on short notice. I'm wondering if any of our colleagues actually travelled with the minister. It was ten days in France and Belgium, I think. I don't know if any of our colleagues went and I wondered if they could share that experience.

**The Chair:** All I can report is that the minister visited some facilities in and around Alberta, which I did with him, but—

**Mr. Roger Valley:** This was the trip Mr. Thibault was supposed to go on and at the very last minute he couldn't go and I couldn't leave within the 40 hours' notice.

• (1540)

**The Chair:** I don't know if anybody else has any—

**Mrs. Betty Hinton:** I can't make a report.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** I was wondering if any of us had been on it.

**Mrs. Betty Hinton:** No, I don't think so. But I did go to Dieppe on behalf of the minister in August for probably one of the most emotionally charged ceremonies I've ever had the privilege of witnessing. That was the Essex and Kent Scottish Regiment.

If you're familiar at all with the way the beaches are in Dieppe, it's a relatively flat beach that slants down rather dramatically to the sea, which is one of the reasons we lost so many men during that Dieppe battle. The ceremony began with the Essex and Kent Scottish Regiment, complete with pipe band in full regalia, marching up from the sea. You couldn't see them from where the monument was situated, but they marched up from the sea and you could hear the pipes and they came across the beach toward the monument area, and I can tell you without a second's hesitation that there was not a dry eye in the crowd. It was extremely well done, very emotional, and we had a number of vets sitting in the audience who were actually on the beaches on the day of the battle and it meant a great deal to them.

Sister Agnes, who was a nursing nun—I believe she is 92 years old, the most highly decorated woman in all of France—was present for this ceremony as well. She spoke to a number of veterans who were in the audience, some of whom were temporarily blinded at the

time they met her and had never laid eyes on her before. They simply remembered her voice. It was....

If I start talking about it too much, I'll start crying again, but the City of Windsor should be very proud of itself. They did a fantastic job. The Essex and Kent Scottish Regiment outdid itself. They were fantastic. I can't say enough good things about how that ceremony went. And if you ever have the privilege or the opportunity to meet Sister Agnes, I would encourage you to do so. She didn't speak English, and my French is terrible, unfortunately, but we sat together with one another and there was no communication problem at all.

I will apologize to my friend, Mr. Perron. I had to make part of my speech in French, but nobody threw rocks, so it's okay.

**The Chair:** That's a moving story.

**Mrs. Betty Hinton:** It was a really great experience. I've said this before, but it bears repeating: any time you have an opportunity to walk through history with those who created it, go. There is no more emotionally charged experience than to be there with someone who was actually there, and when you look at these veterans, it was pretty easy to visualize what they would have looked like sixty years ago. The fight is still in the eye, you know, the honour of the country; it's just there. You can see it in their faces. So it was a really emotionally charged experience and it was wonderful.

**The Chair:** I hope that answers your question.

We don't really have much on the agenda, aside from....

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** Mr. Chairman, is it appropriate to ask a question about the Russian delegation right now, or do you want me to wait?

**The Chair:** Please go ahead.

**Mr. David Sweet:** What will be our obligation for time—just simply the meeting time that we normally have on that day, or will it be necessary to have more?

**The Chair:** All we have right now is from 3:30 until 5:30. However, I do ask colleagues to keep in mind that when we travel to other countries we're often suffering jet lag. I find many a time we're traipsed around from one meeting to the next and we're somewhat discombobulated with regard to what's going on.

I imagine our Russian delegation will be in a not dissimilar state. If we can show them some courtesies.... And some people might want to show them Ottawa or things around here afterwards, if they have time, if their schedule isn't entirely booked with state meetings over at the ambassador's residence and various things, as it usually is. I think they would be greatly appreciative.

I will also say that I'm very heartened that our sister committee from the Russian Federation is visiting Canada. Of course they could go to all sorts of places. But it being that my family came from areas that were once under the Soviet empire, I think it's significant that we do outreach so that Russia sees itself as part of a greater whole, that we heal some of the rifts of the Cold War, and that they see themselves as allies of NATO, and Canada particularly.

I'm glad to see they're coming to Canada, and I hope their attentions turn this way more often than not.

Mr. Sweet, I hope that answers some of your concerns.

Mr. St. Denis.

● (1545)

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** Just to follow up on what David said, actually, I think David raises a good point. They're coming a long way.... I'm sorry, is it committee members or veterans—just to be clear here who is coming?

**The Chair:** My understanding is that they are committee members.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis:** Of the Russian Duma, a standing committee. So they're not going to be veterans; they're like us, then.

If we knew their schedule before our meeting and after, and if we knew that they were coming from somewhere else, going to somewhere else, we'd know we just had this time slot. I agree that we extend whatever courtesy we can, exactly in line with what you're saying—that the long-term dividends of this are not calculable, but certainly they would be positive.

Depending on what day of the week it was, I would certainly make myself available to spend some time after, if that were necessary and desirable.

**The Chair:** It's going to be on the Wednesday, October 4. I know that I will certainly endeavour to look into that or have my staff do so, and we'll follow up and get back to you on it.

Mr. Perron.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** I agree with David and Brent. I think we could quite simply go out for a drink or a meal after the meeting, if they are available.

[English]

We could go over to Sparks on the Tuesday or something like that,

[Translation]

or in a good Scottish bar. That would give them a chance to relax, we could take off our ties and show them that we are not just interested in politics, that we have a human and social side as well.

[English]

**The Chair:** I appreciate that, Mr. Perron.

Based on trips that I've taken previously, and I'm sure others share a similar experience, many a time you go from meeting to meeting and it can be kind of stuffy and formal with the protocol involved and what not, so they may enjoy something a little lighter. I think that's a great suggestion. I will endeavour to check into what the situation is.

Mr. Valley.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** I'm sorry, did you say we're intending to have a full two-hour meeting with them? Will that be the only thing on the agenda that day?

**The Chair:** I believe so. They've requested a meeting with us, and we're trying to be hospitable.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** I think we should make the offer, and if they're in the mood to accept it, if their time allows, let's do it then.

**The Chair:** All right. We will carry on with that.

Perhaps that wraps up some of our intent and discussion on what will be happening when the Russian delegation visits.

Now we have a list—hopefully everybody has a list—of the priority access beds for veterans. I think this will help us determine where we would like to visit across the country, St. Anne's being one of the more significant, with 550 total number of beds. Obviously, it's one of the largest locations in the country for veterans. Then maybe there are some other places we'd like to see. Maybe we'll peruse that list and see if anything jumps out at people.

Mr. Shipley.

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** I have a question. I was looking at it and we were talking about other areas of our study also. I may need to be helped. If we were to look at the hospitals that I think we want to go and see, is there much difference between the hospitals? If we go to one, do we need to go to six of them? I'm only trying to think of a strategy in terms of what we actually want to see to fulfill some of the ongoing studies that we've also talked about in terms of the VIP program.

● (1550)

**The Chair:** You raise a very fair question, Mr. Shipley, and that's one of the reasons we're undertaking a trip: it's because we don't know. I don't, anyhow.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I was simply trying to get a bit of a handle on what.... I guess it's sort of around the discussion about what is our whole plan. Is it the hospitals and something else, or only the hospitals or something else? Perhaps we should talk about that and get an idea of how the committee feels.

**The Chair:** I saw Mrs. Hinton with her hand raised first, and I see some colleagues down the way.

Mrs. Hinton.

**Mrs. Betty Hinton:** Thank you.

I looked at the list briefly and actually the only VAC hospital listed here is St. Anne's. The rest of the hospitals listed here are all provincially run. They wouldn't have a federal component to them, if that makes a difference to anyone.

**The Chair:** Over to Monsieur Perron.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** My comment is similar to what Betty was saying. The only official veterans' hospital is Sainte-Anne. However, that does not prevent us from visiting one, two or three different public hospitals in the provinces to see whether they are providing roughly the same type of care for veterans.

We could easily do this by going to the hospital at Laval University in Sainte-Foy, and to Sainte-Anne's Hospital to compare a hospital specialized in the care of veterans with another that has beds reserved for veterans. We could go to various parts of the country, but we do not need to visit 50 hospitals. Once we have seen four or five, I think we would have a good idea.

Sainte-Anne's hospital is interesting to us, because a new wing was built there not long ago. I do not know whether the construction has been completely finished or whether it will be finished soon, but we invested several million dollars there recently.

In addition, Sainte-Anne's hospital could be involved in treating my young PTSD victims. You know how strongly I feel about this cause. The hospital has already started looking into the symptoms of post-traumatic stress. That would be a good thing to do, even though fewer than about 10 of the 460 beds are reserved for the young veterans I call "my PTSDs". The others receive treatment in outpatient clinics and meet with psychiatrists, psychologists and doctors.

I really believe that the biggest problem we will face in the next 10 or 15 years with veterans will be dealing with those who fought in the Gulf and in Bosnia. Unfortunately, there are some veterans — and I say this with a great deal of regret and sadness — who are dying every day. Two or three of them have died of old age. However, there are young people as well, and we have to start providing the proper services for them when they come back from Afghanistan and other missions. That will be the problem we have to face in 10 years, but we are already starting to see it.

[English]

**The Chair:** Yes, I agree.

Forgive my ignorance, Mr. Perron; I'll follow up on your discussion. St. Anne is in Montreal?

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** It is about an hour and 15 minutes from here, along Highway 417, west of Montreal.

[English]

**The Chair:** And St. Paul?

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** St. Paul? Where's St. Paul?

**The Chair:** You mentioned St. Paul.

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** Sainte-Foy. That's in Quebec City. It's in the city of Quebec City. It's three hours from Montreal, always driving.

**The Chair:** I'm glad I asked, because I saw the residences here and Sainte Foy. All right, so Quebec City, fair enough, okay. I'm amenable to that.

Now we had Mr. Stoffer.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Excuse my ignorance; this is more a question for Michel. I noticed there are no bed facilities in Labrador, Yukon, Northwest Territories, or Nunavut. Is that the way it is? For any veterans who may decide to retire up there, would they have any access to facilities in the north or Labrador, or would they have to be sent somewhere else?

•(1555)

**Mr. Michel Rossignol (Committee Researcher):** No, this is a list of the priority access beds in the locations. A veteran in one of the territories or in one of the areas where there is no priority access bed would probably be invited either to go to the closest health centre where there was a priority access bed, or if that was too far I think there would be some other arrangement made directly by the department, because some of these priority beds are arrangements with contracts with provincial health authorities. I think the department, if there is a need somewhere, would be able to do something in the local area, but most of the access beds are only available here in the list.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

As I was scrolling through the list here, I think it makes sense to visit a provincial facility in Quebec and then the federal facility at St. Anne. That makes sense to me.

There's one here we have in Ottawa, and that's the Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre. It's here in the city; it's got to be easy to knock off, so why we wouldn't visit that, I can't imagine. It seems like an obvious one to me. That's three, in a sense: we have the two in Quebec and one here in Ottawa.

Is there any other facility that people feel...? Mr. Stoffer.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** I think those are concentrated in major centres or close to major centres. I think it would be helpful, especially for those MPs from rural ridings and rural areas, to see what facilities are like in a small rural town. Wherever that is, I'd be open to the committee. But I think you see for example Springhill in Nova Scotia has a few beds there, and there's New Brunswick, Alberta, and Manitoba. It would be interesting to see how it works in the town of Medicine Hat.

**The Chair:** Okay. I think we all probably have a sense that it's significantly less than it would be in a major centre, but if you'd like to see one of those, I see the value in that.

Where is Springhill in relation to your riding, Mr. Stoffer?

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Springhill is in Bill Casey's riding. It's about a two and a half hour drive from the Halifax airport. It's the home of Anne Murray.

**The Chair:** All right. Are you proposing then to visit Springhill?

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** Sure.

**Mr. Michel Rossignol:** If there's a visit to Springhill, it would also be easy to visit Camp Hill, the main veterans hospital in Halifax, which would be very close by as well and has a large number of veterans.

**The Chair:** Are there any other discussions on this?

**Mrs. Betty Hinton:** If you're going to do the east and you're going to do the Maritimes, you'd better do the west. My concern is that this will limit us to doing just the hospitals and nothing else on the committee. But I'm comfortable if everybody else is comfortable.

**The Chair:** I'm speaking on behalf of the west. I know I've seen some facilities there. I'm surprised that Colonel Belcher isn't on here in some capacity. Maybe it is. Yes, it is. Good. But I've seen it, so I'm not going to propose it. I'm very impressed with it. It's a new modern facility and all that stuff, but I don't feel a particular draw because I've seen those facilities. I haven't seen Springhill and some of these other ones, St. Anne being the most significant.

I believe that if other members of the committee want to propose, they have a right. I don't feel a particular need to drag this out that way unless somebody else wants to.

I see no sense of drag.

Mr. Shipley.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** I've been to the Parkwood in London, so I have an understanding of what the hospitals are like. I just want to focus on the value of what we're going to be doing. Is it for information, just to see how they operate and what the circumstances are like in them? I don't suspect we're going to be there to make recommendations based on the operations of the hospital. I don't know. That's a question. I'm just trying to get a handle on what we're going to be doing when we go there. I think it's a fair question.

If we're going to pick a number of hospitals around, I guess I want to have an idea of what the mandate or purpose will be if we're going to visit more than one or two of them.

• (1600)

**The Chair:** Typically on committees we have people come to testify as witnesses, and going out to see these facilities could be our somewhat limited window on the world. I realize that all of us have some facilities in or near our ridings that we have probably seen or partaken of, but it gives you a richer background in understanding the different facilities, things available across the country, and the trials and tribulations. It gives you a portal on the world, other than just the committee room itself.

Monsieur Perron.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** Further to what Bev was saying, I would say that the hospital in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue is the only one where we will feel at home, so to speak. It is a Canadian hospital, and we are Canadian members of Parliament. In the other hospitals, we would almost be viewed as visitors coming to see a patient.

In Gagetown, New Brunswick, there is a problem having to do with Agent Orange. Why not go to a hospital located close by? We should see how the veterans are being treated and find out whether those who say they have problems related to Agent Orange or Agent Purple are getting the care they need.

In addition, I am really very surprised to hear that some hospitals in northern and southern Ontario have about 100 beds available. Where are these hospitals? Are there any in Kirkland Lake, New Liskeard, North Bay and South Temiscamingue?

I know, Michel, that you cannot give us an answer, because the list is put out by the Department of Veterans Affairs. It is incomplete in that it does not state which hospitals are specialized in psychiatric care, for example. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a psychiatric problem. So even before we organize a visit to hospitals, we must know where the largest groups of veterans in hospital or receiving care are located, and the specialty of the various hospital. Tests have been carried out in Gagetown or another place in Nova Scotia. It would be a good idea to visit hospitals in the surrounding area to try to find out whether the people who claim they were poisoned by the gas in Gagetown are telling the truth.

[English]

**The Chair:** In some respects, the answer to Mr. Shipley's question is that it's information gathering.

Mr. Valley, and then Mr. Rota.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** I think it's clear that the first one we have to see is St. Anne's. If we're going to see any others we have to have a plan. Are we going to visit different regions, or are we going to see a large one and a small one?

I think we want to do it right, if we're going to visit any others after that. Maybe St. Anne's should be the first one because it's close for us. We can get it done and then make a plan. As Mr. Stoffer says, large or small, pick two or three that fit across the country and get our job done.

**The Chair:** Fair enough.

Mr. Rota.

**Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.):** If I could just follow on Bev Shipley's question, I'm not quite clear why we're going to see them, and to what end. Do we have a study on hospitals? We have some stuff identified here, but hospitals or veterans hospitals are not there. Will we be doing that? I can see the nodding on the other side. Travelling for the sake of travelling.... I'd love to go, and it sounds very interesting, but what are we going to do with the information, and what information are we looking for at the hospital?

• (1605)

**The Chair:** I think we were just following up on suggestions from previous meetings. We've got the information, and we were preparing it all so we could be ready to roll. Some people are interested in having more info, some people want a truncated list, and some people want an expanded list.

Mr. Stoffer.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** There are two things. St. Anne's, as you know, is the only federally run veterans hospital. The rest are done in cooperation with the provinces. I know there's a big difference in the level of service in some of them. When we were at Ste. Anne's the last time they said the waiting period was less than a week, whereas for Camp Hill in Halifax, the waiting period was 90 days minimum. So there is a difference in service. We've heard from Veterans Affairs before that although World War II veterans and the Korean veterans are dying off, they're expecting a large influx of what are called modern-day veterans, cold war veterans, and there will be many more of them.

I guess the question is, is the government proceeding with long-term plans to allocate these facilities properly so that when these individuals require hospital care, there will be facilities available for them? Most of this would have to be in cooperation with the provinces. I don't think we've ever talked about that. For these types of planning needs, you need years in advance to determine where they are and if there are facilities to meet their possible needs down the road without having to wait for those services. That would be an interesting point to look at, to advise the government on what they may or may not be able to do for the near future.

**The Chair:** If I may, because we've had kind of a wide-ranging discussion here, my sense so far is that I think it is fairly important or significant, because it is the largest facility in the country, to visit St. Anne's. I sense because of the ease of the mission that the one here in Ottawa is kind of a no-brainer. Then maybe once we've done those two...we have two others on the table here, Quebec City and Camp Hill.

Mr. Sweet.

**Mr. David Sweet:** I liked Mr. Valley's idea that if we visit one or two local places, it's time efficient, it gives us an idea about the kind of information we want to gather, and the experience will lend itself to the dynamics of what kinds of goals we want to have on this or whether those two visits close by are sufficient enough to answer most of the questions the members here would have. With regard to having some familiarity when we have witnesses here, that would speak to the kind of service they were given.

**The Chair:** I take it from your comments, Mr. Sweet, that the idea of visiting Ottawa and Montreal makes sense to you.

**Mr. David Sweet:** They're close by and it's efficient.

**The Chair:** I'm just trying to nail Jell-O to the wall here, and I mean that not in a specific sense but in a collective sense.

Mr. Valley.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** Could I make a motion then that we visit St. Anne's at a time when it's convenient for the committee?

**The Chair:** We already have a motion for that. This is the reason why we're going through this. For any who are asking questions why, that's why. So I appreciate that. It was agreed unanimously.

What I'm wondering then, since Mr. Valley is kind of speaking to this, and along the lines of what we're trying to accomplish here... maybe we could have a motion from you to visit the Ottawa facility. I'm suggesting this. We already have one for St. Anne's. Is somebody willing to move a motion with regard to the Ottawa facility?

Mr. Shipley so moves. Seconded by Mr. St. Denis.

Is there any debate on that motion for the Ottawa facility visitation?

Mr. Perron.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** I agree with everyone, but I want to be very sure what is involved.

We are going to visit the Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue hospital and the one in Ottawa. Then we will determine whether it is necessary to visit other hospitals and whether we have some idea about the recommendations we want to make. Is that correct?

[English]

**The Chair:** That is what I take from it, Monsieur Perron, yes.

Is there any other debate on that motion for visiting the Ottawa facility?

All those in favour of visiting the Ottawa facility?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** We'll revisit that issue again after visiting St. Anne's and the Ottawa facility.

Is there anything else people would like to raise here at the committee today?

Mr. Perron.

•(1610)

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** I think we are facing a scheduling problem. The committee has suspended its study of the ombudsman issue. Some veterans have told us that they more or less agree. I think the study is drawing to a close and that we need only get the opinion of someone like André Marin, who is now the ombudsman of Ontario, and who was formerly the ombudsman of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces. He could tell us whether or not we need an ombudsman for veterans. We could also ask an ombudsman in another province to explain what the role of a veterans' ombudsman would be and whether we need one. I think we do, but we have to make a decision about that. We have heard the views of those who would benefit from an ombudsman. We must now hear from specialists who have some experience as ombudsmen.

[English]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Perron, just to speak to that, and then we've got a list here with Mr. Valley, and Mr. Stoffer indicated he's got an extra point there. We didn't present this because it hasn't been translated, but we do have a list here of some people who would like to make appearances before us, relating to this. For example, the War Amps, UN peacekeepers, the Royal Canadian Legion want to make presentations on that subject, so we will get to that, but unfortunately we couldn't provide the list *en français* today, so next committee meeting we'll have that.



Mrs. Hinton, we're going to take you after Mr. Valley and Mr. Stoffer.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** If my memory serves, doesn't St. Anne's have its own ombudsman? Isn't that what we heard before? Is it possible to meet with them while we're on site?

**The Chair:** That sounds perfectly acceptable to me.

**Mr. Roger Valley:** We should meet some people on their territory if we can, and that might start the discussion.

**The Chair:** That sounds like a wise idea.

Mr. Stoffer.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** This is on another related matter. You said "other business"?

**The Chair:** Oh, okay, therefore, I'm going to revert to Mrs. Hinton if this is related to the ombudsman discussion.

**Mrs. Betty Hinton:** It is related to the ombudsman discussion. I just wanted to clarify that there will be an ombudsman. The government has made a commitment to do that. The question we have to ask as a committee is, do we want to have input into it? I thought it was very important that all parties did have input into it. So it's never been a question of whether or not there will be an ombudsman—there will be. The criteria is going to be developed by this committee, if the committee wants to have that input, and we did choose to do that at the beginning of the session.

**The Chair:** Mr. Stoffer, over to you again.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** On a separate issue, you should know the Royal Canadian Legion elected a new president at their national convention in Calgary. I thought it would be a nice gesture for our committee, for you, sir, to not only write a letter to Mary Ann Burdett, the immediate past president, to thank her for her work and her advice to us, but also to welcome the new president, congratulate him on his position, and possibly invite him whenever it's convenient for the committee to meet him personally and to ask how we can move forward together. They are a large organization.

**The Chair:** I'd be honoured to do so, if you wish to pass a motion to that effect.

• (1615)

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** If I may.

**The Chair:** All right, Mr. Stoffer is moving the motion, seconded by Mr. Sweet. Any debate on that? No.

All those in favour of a "thank you" to the past president and "welcome" to the new president of the Royal Canadian Legion and an invitation from the committee?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Do we have any other interventions? Seeing none, good; I think we've got an agenda of sorts set here and we've got our feet wet again now that school is back in session.

If there are other people you'd like to add to the list, please let us know the names. We already have a list here, and we've got even more that we haven't formally added on yet.

Monsieur Gaudet.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ):** My question is simple. I do not speak often, but generally when I have something to say, I say it.

I would like our meetings to be carefully planned, because the last time we met with certain people, they kept repeating the same thing. I agree that we should meet once or twice a week, but I want to achieve concrete results. The way things are going, we're taking one step forward and one step backward at the same time.

We should have a good meeting. If we have only one a week, it should be complete and well organized. I think that would better for all veterans and for the committee and Parliament. We should not bring in witnesses who all repeat the same thing that others have said before.

[English]

**The Chair:** I understand, Monsieur Gaudet. We have people who wish to speak to us, and we can choose to turn them down. If those people who want to speak to us repeat themselves, that's their choice. We can choose to direct some of their comments, possibly toward areas we think are more meaningful.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** I agree with you, Mr. Chairman. However, if a person is supposed to be here for an hour, and if after twenty minutes we have no further questions to ask him, I wonder who is more dissatisfied after the meeting. Often, our witnesses did not use all of the time available to them, and we had no further questions to ask them to make up the rest of the time. In cases like that, they were perhaps dissatisfied when they left. That is what worries me.

People who come to meet with us should leave feeling happy that they had an opportunity to say what they had to say. We need a well-structured meeting, so be it, but we should not bring people in from across the country and have a situation where after twenty minutes, we have no further questions to ask them. We should be in a position to ask the witnesses questions. Otherwise, we ask them to come here for nothing. That is just my opinion, I am not moving a motion. I am simply stating what happens.

[English]

**The Chair:** Just to let you know, Monsieur Gaudet, the way it operates is that we allow witnesses to speak for 20 minutes, and then it's opened up to questions. The people we have on our list, of which we will provide a copy *en français* at the next meeting, are people who do want to speak to the committee.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** I do not have a problem with that.

[English]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** They have something of substance to say.

**The Chair:** I'll charge you with a responsibility, and that is, if there are people you really, really, super-duper want to hear from, let us know.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer:** How do you translate "super-duper"?

**The Chair:** That's parliamentary language.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** I am not familiar enough with this to suggest a witness. Mr. Perron is, as he has sat on the committee for a long time.

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** I am old.

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** No, you are knowledgeable. As for me, I have only been a member for three years.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Then so far maybe we'll take—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** I know more about elections than I do veterans.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Then we'll operate with the ones who have an interest in showing up, how about that?

Okay. Well, thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned until next week.

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