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Mr. Rick Casson

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• (1705)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC)): Order.

Two motions have been presented to the committee, one by Ms. Black and one by Mr. Wilfert, that basically deal with the same things.

Is Mr. Dewar coming back? Are we aware of that?

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Okay.

Now I would....

Go ahead, Mrs. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, is it really fair to be discussing these motions without Ms. Black—or Mr. Wilfert, for that matter? I think Ms. Black gave her motion first, and the motion from Mr. Wilfert appears to be nearly identical.

I just wonder about the fairness of discussing it in her absence.

The Chair: You raised that as a point of order. I'm accepting both of these motions to be debated here. If Ms. Black is not here, it's her responsibility to have somebody in her place. I understand that's going to happen here very shortly.

So I think the motions are both in order, and we'll deal with them.

Did somebody else have a comment?

And I'm not sure why they are not here.

An hon. member: Call the motion, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Black's motion came in first, so hers is the first motion on the floor. It was presented properly—distributed in both official languages, with proper notice given—so we're going to deal with it.

Go ahead.

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): On a point of order, I don't believe you can accept this as a.... This is a notice of motion. To accept it as a motion, I believe it has to be moved from the floor, and the only one who can do that is the mover of the motion.

The Chair: Well, I don't see them. I'm going to ask somebody to move it now.

Mr. Rob Merrifield: The only one who can move it is the mover of the motion, the one who put it in.

The Chair: Are you sure about that? I know you're chair of another committee, so I appreciate that.

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Yes, we checked it out.

The Chair: So it requires the mover of the motion or the designate. I don't see the designate here, so we can't deal with it at this time.

The other motion was presented by Mr. Wilfert. I don't see him here either.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): I'm his designate.

The Chair: You're his designate? And you've been properly sworn in, with all the proper documents tabled?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Nothing would happen unless I was proper.

The Chair: Okay. I'll have to have somebody move that motion.

It's moved by Mr. Easter as the designate of Mr. Wilfert.

Is there any discussion on that motion?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, I think the motion is pretty straightforward in what it states, basically that the Auditor General immediately conduct a thorough review of all Canadian Forces bases to evaluate the available services, treatments, and care for mental health injuries provided by the Department of National Defence.

As I think you're well aware, there's been some considerable concern raised to committee members in the public arena on this issue. Certainly, as the mover of the motion, we feel the best way to get at the facts of the issue is to have the Auditor General conduct this kind of a review.

The Chair: I'm just going to make a comment, if I can, as the chair.

We're in the middle of a study, as you all know, dealing with the quality of life in the health care system and its services. Out of this study will come a report, with recommendations to the government. It seems to me that this could be one of the recommendations. I'm just going to lay that out there. That's why I was a little confused when I saw both of these motions. I'm not sure why this can't be dealt with within the text or the body of the report.

I don't know if you have a comment on that, as the mover, before we go on.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Well, it would probably be better if Brian were here, but as I understand it, in the discussions I've had, it's the urgency of the issue that some feel they're facing. Second, even though you may or may not have it in your report, the fact is that the Auditor General is perhaps the best authority to do this kind of an audit and to come back with the facts. One of the first things we do as members of Parliament on the day the Auditor General tables her reports is that we go to the latter to find the factual detail and the background on any of the issues she's audited.

So it's really the urgency of the situation, and to get it done in a proper form.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

I know that several people from the Liberal Party on this committee are fairly new in terms of this study. Anthony has been on the committee before, but he did come in partway during this. And, in addition to Mr. Wilfert, what they may not know that there was an Auditor General report done in 2007. That is in part what triggered the study we're doing right now. She has also confirmed that she will be examining defence procurement in her upcoming studies.

In addition to the Auditor General's work that she's doing in the defence department, there is a chief of review services at the Department of National Defence. They have also launched into a formal review into the care of injured Canadian Forces members and their families. This review started in January. It will include an examination of mental health services, including the situation in Gagetown. The final report is expected in the fall.

I'm just wondering if we could.... It may be a good recommendation to let that report come to light. We'd look at it, and then we may have further direction for the Auditor General at that time, or no direction. And we ourselves are studying this subject. I would certainly like us to finish our investigation before we pre-empt our study with the Auditor General.

There certainly are some problems at Gagetown. These problems are not isolated at Gagetown; these same problems, if not worse, are occurring at Base Petawawa. We should allow the process in place right now to play out.

I am not sure if any of you have been involved, as a departmental employee, while there was an Auditor General investigation going on. But we have to ask ourselves, as members of the committee who are doing the study in the best interest of the soldiers themselves, whether the upheaval of yet another study going on at the same time is in the best interest of caring for those soldiers. It will take up the time of the people who are charged with taking care of their physical and mental health.

Further to your suggestion, Mr. Chairman, that we perhaps put it as a suggestion, while in Wainwright—I see several people here who were not in Wainwright—this very issue was addressed. Unfortunately, Ms. Black was not able to be in Wainwright due to illness.

What they told us was that, yes, it's a crisis, and yes, they know there are things very wrong in Gagetown and Petawawa. Really, at

the end of the day it boils down to having enough money to attract doctors away from the civilian workplace to the military workplace.

In fact, what they've done in Wainwright is to contract out medical services through a company, which I believe they call Calian. They were able to get the number of doctors needed to care for the people in Wainwright and Edmonton through something very innovative. They have a premier in their province who is very supportive of the military. He worked with the universities, and he was able to negotiate an accreditation program with a university in South Africa. Because the university's medical graduates from South Africa could start practising in Canada right away, they were able to get those doctors. That may be part of the solution to the overall shortage of doctors and specialists in the military.

In Ontario, we have a premier who caps the cost of health by limiting the number of doctors. That also is contributing to the shortage of doctors available to the military.

They also mentioned at Wainwright that they have a casualty repatriation manual. We don't have that with us today, but it is in place. It is a matter, again, of having the dollars to follow through with it.

● (1710)

Lastly, based on what we heard in Wainwright, I would even recommend that we perhaps hear as witnesses representatives from Calian before we go any further with our instructions to the Auditor General.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks for that.

Is there anybody else?

Mr. Rota.

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): I agree with you, Mr. Chair; I think this request is probably going to be imminent in the report. It's going to be in the report. We're doing it.

I think we realize that there are problems across the country, and there's a variation in the levels of service being offered. Some service is weaker, some is more positive. I think we've come to that conclusion. So why should we wait for something when we're going to ask for it anyway and get it right away? Or we can just request it right away. I don't see a problem with the resolution or with the motion.

What we're looking at is the service that is being offered to our armed forces, and we want the best for them. I think we've pretty well determined that there's a lack there, that something has to be done. We've come to that conclusion. We want what's best for our armed forces, for our troops. We request it from the Auditor General because we know that's what they need.

So requesting it now is just getting a report that, hopefully, will lead to a solution that much more quickly, rather than waiting six months or eight months. A lot can happen in six to eight months in an individual's life. I think this is going to run in parallel and really help us get to where we want to be.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lunney.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Colleagues, I don't think we want to prolong this discussion to great lengths, but I just want to make the point that we should consider how the Auditor General's office works. We know she has limited resources to apply to each department, and she works through those at a sort of systemic level, and when there's a crisis, she can respond to that. But considering that she just reported in this area as recently as 2007, just a few months ago, that the study that the CRS was doing already is about 40% complete and will be coming up shortly....

We know there's a shortage of medical personnel, and that DND is competing for medical personnel across the country. In Edmonton, where, let's say, the province is doing very well, and there are more resources, and they have access to more resources than do some of the remote areas, in some of the other provinces, it's just not the case. So we've pretty well identified the problem.

I suspect that we can go ahead, and if the committee ends up passing this motion.... I don't think it actually makes sense right now, because we can probably put it as a recommendation. It's probably not going to change much anyway. So I just think that she's already done it, and probably we can put the motion through. I doubt she's

going to have the resources or the time on her priority list to address it right now anyway, but if it makes members feel better to make that motion, I guess we'll take the vote on it.

We certainly have recognized the need. We're probably going to put it in our own report. There are already other investigations going on. I'd suggest maybe we should just make sure we've made a recommendation in our report and go that way.

The Chair: Okay.

Are we ready for the question, or are there any further comments?

All right. The motion has been presented. It's been debated.

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

The Chair: The other motion—I see somebody here now from the NDP—becomes a little bit redundant, but if you want to move the motion, we can deal with it.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Actually, Mr. Chair, we are prepared to withdraw this motion.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Is there anything else to be dealt with?

The meeting is adjourned.

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