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Chair

Mr. David Sweet

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•(1145)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC)): Good morning, everyone.

[English]

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. We are a little bit behind because of the vote.

This is our ninth meeting on our study of the new Veterans Charter. We have with us today retired Colonel Patrick Stogran, Veterans Ombudsman, as well as Pierre Allard, service bureau director for the Royal Canadian Legion, Dominion Command.

We want to thank you, Mr. Allard, for the nice commemorative pins. We appreciate them.

Mr. Stoffer wanted a moment to say something.

Please go ahead, Mr. Stoffer. Then we'll go to the witnesses' opening statements.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): I just have two quick things to say. In case some of the committee members aren't aware, the government announced recently that Colonel Don Ethell, who has appeared before our committee, is now the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta. I just thought it was a great move and that we may want to write a letter congratulating him.

Also, the Royal Canadian Legion has announced that Vice-Admiral Larry Murray, the former deputy minister of Veterans Affairs, will be made honorary president of the Royal Canadian Legion in June.

I just wanted to let the committee know. It's great news on both sides.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stoffer.

We'll send congratulatory letters to both of them from the committee. I'll ask the clerk to draft something for both.

Without any further delay, Mr. Stogran, welcome. Please go ahead with your opening remarks.

Colonel (Retired) Patrick Stogran (Veterans Ombudsman, Office of the Veterans Ombudsman): Mr. Chair and honourable members, thank you for affording me the opportunity to appear before you once again.

As I understand it, you have asked me back to comment on the new Veterans Charter. You're probably aware that, since January, I have travelled coast to coast with my team and listened to what

veterans have had to say about the benefits and services they are receiving and not receiving. In addition, I have also launched online public consultations through our website.

These meetings and consultations have been highly instructive. They have helped me understand much more clearly the concerns of veterans with respect to the new Veterans Charter.

As you all know, the charter was given royal assent in May 2005, five years ago, with the clear acknowledgement that it was not perfect. At the time, it was agreed that as a living charter it would be continuously reviewed and evaluated, presumably to ensure that "the recognized obligation of the people and the Government of Canada to those who have served their country so well and to their dependants may be fulfilled".

I say "presumably" because while that obligation is clearly stated in the preamble to other pieces of legislation regarding veterans, nowhere in the charter does it say as much. Other acts also direct that the provisions and regulations shall be "liberally construed and interpreted". Although it might be argued that the Interpretation Act accommodates this, it does not do so to the end of ensuring that veterans and their families receive the treatment they rightfully deserve. Once again, saying nothing says a lot.

[Translation]

Was the omission of such a preamble an oversight, or is it yet another sign of an evolving change to our commitment to veterans? My perception of a change in commitment is also apparent in other departmental plans, policies and programs.

[English]

The most noteworthy is the department's clear intention to stop maintaining priority access beds or contract beds for elderly veterans. Currently, only World War II and Korean War veterans have access to departmental contract beds. For the 592,000 Canadian Forces veterans who are not eligible for these beds, is the country less committed to their needs? When our World War II and Korean War veterans finally pass on, what will happen to this program?

The lump sum disability award has been the focus of fierce criticism from the veterans community. In town hall meetings in communities across Canada, I've encountered this criticism first-hand. As an incentive to making it more appealing for disabled veterans to go back to work rather than remain on disability, the program is viewed by many as a step back from the commonly recognized obligation of the people and Government of Canada.

We should not be under any misapprehension that this issue is new. In 1928 the House Committee on Pensions and Returned Soldier Problems dealt with the same issue of having given soldiers lump sums under the Pension Act. In retrospect, a committee member stated, "We should never have passed that law", to which the chairman replied, "I think we are all agreed on that now." In my view, it doesn't make sense to hand a disabled veteran a fistful of money and expect that they have the means to go off and start a new life for themselves.

While the intent of the charter to reintegrate veterans is laudable, I would submit that the fundamental premise upon which it appears to be based is flawed. Service in the Canadian Forces or the RCMP is not just another job. Within the CF and the RCMP, changing jobs is not uncommon. During my career in the army, I probably had at least 15 jobs. However, service in the Canadian Forces and the RCMP is a way of life. It's a culture unto itself.

As my wife says, "Soldiering is not what he does, it's who he is". For me and, I dare say, for a great many veterans, leaving the military was a huge culture shock that makes reintegration into the civilian workforce much more problematic than simply finding another job.

Indeed, if my wife's views are not as compelling for you as they have become for me, I can offer the words of Dr. Anne Irwin, assistant professor with the Department of Anthropology at the University of Calgary and the CDFAI chair in civil-military relations, who says:

I have always thought that it is astonishing that the military spends so much institutional energy socializing recruits into a new culture (what some could call a "total institution"), spends [an] inordinate amount of time and institutional energy reinforcing the different values and ways of behaving throughout a career, and then expects people to be able to leave the military and integrate into civilian society unproblematically with nothing more than a few briefings on changing careers.

While that might be considered by some to be an overly simplistic statement, its message must not be lost in the new Veterans Charter debate. When a psychological or physical disability is combined with that culture shock, the transition from the CF or RCMP back into civilian life is much more difficult than the new Veterans Charter would have us believe. I hasten to suggest that this may be beyond the comprehension of anyone who has not served in uniform.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

A wound or an injury suffered in the line of duty or in preparation for combat operations cannot and should not be likened to an industrial accident. The treatment of veterans and the families of service personnel who have been injured or killed in the line of duty is not an issue for insurance companies and worker's compensation.

[*English*]

Yet the design of the new Veterans Charter even incorporates the prescriptive long-term disability-based formulas of an insurance company. We talk about Canada's commitment to veterans' needs, and then enabling legislation and supporting guidelines fail to foster the department's new needs-based philosophy.

In closing, I reassert my urging that the new Veterans Charter be revised quickly, comprehensively, transparently, and with full retroactivity to all veterans who have been affected by it. We've come to a significant milestone in our history regarding the treatment of veterans, and the decisions we make now will affect veterans, their families, and indeed our country, for decades to come.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stogran.

Now, Monsieur Allard, may I have your opening remarks?

Mr. Pierre Allard (Service Bureau Director, Dominion Command, Royal Canadian Legion): Honourable Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, on behalf of the Legion's Dominion president, Wilf Edmond, it is a pleasure for me to appear today at your committee to continue discussions related to the new Veterans Charter.

We have consulted, and the following veterans associations are in agreement with our Legion presentation today: the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada; the Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping; the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association; the National Aboriginal Veterans Association; the Air Force Association of Canada; the Canadian Naval Air Group; the Naval Officers' Association of Canada; and the Last Post Fund.

[*Translation*]

Your support of veterans and their families is exemplary. It is obvious that you care. There should be no doubt that the Royal Canadian Legion also cares for veterans and their families.

[*English*]

You have been briefed by Veterans Affairs Canada officials on the new Veterans Charter programs, and by other advocates, including members of the NVC advisory group.

We are struck by two obvious trends in the testimony that you have heard. First, there seems to be a reluctance by VAC officials to acknowledge gaps in the NVC programs, notwithstanding the very thorough analysis and the concrete recommendations of the New Veterans Charter Advisory Group.

Second, it is becoming very clear that the NVC programs have duplicated other programs that were already in place, resulting in more confusion and delays, when the objective of the new Veterans Charter was to facilitate rapid intervention. The introduction of the NVC has resulted in more confusing eligibility grids, which have put into question whether or not all veterans are treated equally and fairly.

The outcome of any legislation should be fairness. This is even more fundamental for those who put their lives at risk for the protection of the nation and of national values.

In their report of October 3, 2009, the NVC advisory group identified gaps in three areas: family support services, financial security, and rehabilitation services and outcomes. VAC has always defined the new Veterans Charter as a family of interrelated outcomes that cannot be viewed as stand-alone elements. The Legion still supports the new Veterans Charter's broad goal of "wellness", which is meant to facilitate the reintegration into civilian life of the disabled veterans while meeting the needs of their families. However, we are greatly concerned that the "living Charter" focus has been set aside.

We are concerned that the issues of fairness and equality are not being addressed. Improvements are required on a critical basis in the following areas: mental health support for families in their own right, and greater access to vocational assistance for veterans and spouses, including post-secondary education. Children of deceased veterans already have this benefit. It is of note that if you want to work for the public service, the lack of a university degree, even under the priority appointment programs for certain medically released CF members and spouses, is often the cause for screening out applicants.

Another improvement required is that of improved access to skilled health care providers. There are too many disparities between rural and urban centres in regard to lack of access to specialists, etc. All released members, especially medically released members, often do not have access to medical care.

Other improvements needed are: improved support to family members caring for critically injured veterans; increased support for survivors and families of the fallen; and, under financial security, ending the legacy of the insurance-based approach to economic benefits. Veterans deserve a better model than the SISIP workers' compensation model. This is an area of clear duplication, which even VAC recognizes in their internal documents—and we'll get to that.

Other improvements needed are: to improve earning loss benefits by raising the earnings loss to 100% taxable and establishing a higher base salary consistent with normal rank progression and probable earnings models; to increase access to permanent impairment allowance; and to increase disability awards to at least match the maximum cap awarded by the civilian courts, by including a structured settlement option that recognizes that some disabled veterans may not be able handle a large lump sum.

Under rehabilitation services, the following improvements are needed: a modernized rehabilitation program to provide integrated physical, social, and vocational rehab services, and this is linked to the elimination of SISIP rehab services; improved case management, not only for veterans, but also for their families, while addressing clients' needs; improved access to VAC rehabilitation services; and repair of damaged relationships with health care providers.

You will have noticed that the issue of SISIP is a recurrent theme. In a recent internal audit, VAC has come to some very interesting conclusions on the new Veterans Charter programs. Copies of this audit are included in your handout. I will quote directly from VAC's

cryptic observations that there are some similarities to other programs.

Under disability award, it is stated:

SISIP is an insurance plan offered by the CF...to serving and former members of the CF and their spouses.... Through SISIP, veterans can apply for an Accidental Dismemberment Insurance Plan which provides a lump-sum benefit...if [dismemberment]...is attributable to military service.... This benefit may appear to duplicate the Disability Award; however, the purpose is very different.... [SISIP dismemberment]...is an insurance payout while Disability Award is for pain and suffering....

● (1155)

The audit report then addresses rehabilitation:

SISIP Long Term Disability Vocational Rehabilitation Program provides training and education to eligible beneficiaries with the goal of enhancing the former member's existing education, skills, training and experience. This program is administered to provide eligible individuals with the skills to obtain gainful employment in the civilian workforce. This program overlaps with VAC's vocational rehabilitation services.... It is estimated that approximately 15% of the 3,700 Veterans currently in the SISIP Vocational Rehabilitation Program will go on to access VAC's vocational rehabilitation services.

Note that figure of 15%.

The report continues:

The difference between these programs is that through SISIP the vocational training is centered on the existing education while VAC's vocational rehabilitation services concentrates on providing training for a skill that is appropriate for the client's health interests and in the long term will provide gainful employment.

Of note, the VAC audit report fails to acknowledge, however, that both SISIP long-term disability and VAC's rehab program result in a monthly payment equivalent to 75% of salary at release—the so-called VAC earnings loss benefit—while we are well aware that SISIP payments are offset by disability pension payments or by EL benefits. Why make a comparison to the NVC disability award when addressing the SISIP long-term disability, while not making a similar comparison when dealing with the new Veterans Charter earnings loss benefits?

Other similarities exist in the area of career transition. Again, let's refer to the report:

DND provides CF members a Transition Assistance Program which assists medically releasing CF members in making the transition into the civilian workplace. VAC provides a similar service within the Rehabilitation Program by providing vocational assistance to help medically released CF members find suitable employment. There is some overlap present in that both programs provide medically releasing CF members with information on résumé writing, job search assistance and job finding assistance. The difference is that DND's Transition Assistance Program actively recruits prospective employers; in both the public and private sector....

DND's Second Career Assistance Network is designed to assist CF members in order to provide transferable skills analysis, as well as counselling and training to individuals who are preparing for civilian life. VAC's Job Placement program is integrated with this network and a VAC-DND program arrangement was developed to establish the roles and protocols for VAC to now deliver these services which were previously delivered by the DND.

We are suggesting that we are not dealing with similarities; rather, we are dealing with duplication and sometimes triplication. One must ask why VAC developed a new Veterans Charter that in a number of areas duplicates services that were offered by DND and SISIP, while in other instances, some of the new programs seem to have resulted in significant savings for the department while creating additional categories of veterans.

Another concern is that in some programs VAC has grossly overestimated the uptake. Again, I'm quoting from the report:

Additionally, the estimated number of clients was based on a sample of 400 released CF members.... Since the Job Placement Program was not designed for clients with a disability the methodological flaw was increased. In addition, from this sample only 162 clients participated...indicating that they would have "liked help in finding a job after release." This percentage was then used as the basis for estimating that...52% of the approximately 4,000 CF [members] who release annually, would access the...[Job Placement Program]. VAC further estimated that...90%...would access the career counselling and job finding assistance components. However, since...October 2007, only 1,490 clients have attended a workshop with only 18% receiving career counseling and 3% accessing job finding assistance.

In an attempt to increase participation, VAC has been mailing out letters to those who might be eligible. "However", says the report, "the response from the mail-out resulted in only a few hundred additional Veterans applying."

One wonders how many other design flaws have been built into the new Veterans Charter. To correct the last flaw in the so-called job placement program, VAC has found the perfect bureaucratic remedy. It is redesigning—rebranding, as they say—this program as the career transition services.

Since all the current VAC brochures refer to the job placement program, what will the cost of this rebranding be?

● (1200)

What credibility can we assess to the VAC audit statement that this program is "relevant and highly valued" when only 3% of the participants have access to job-finding assistance?

Gaps in the new Veterans Charter have been identified by a reputable advisory council of academics and representatives of veterans organizations chosen by Veterans Affairs Canada. We are still waiting for an official reply from the minister on the findings and recommendations of the New Veterans Charter Advisory Group. If the NVC is indeed a "living Charter", when will it be modified? Changes are needed now.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allard.

Now we'll go to our regular round of questioning. We have only 55 minutes, so I will be just a little extra disciplined in trying to keep it tight to get as many questioners in as possible.

Mr. Oliphant, for seven minutes.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you.

Thanks to both of you for being here.

Thank you, Colonel, for your round tables. I was able to go to one—the one in Montreal—and it was well done. Your work today is obviously very improved by those consultations.

Both of our witnesses today have obviously looked at the problems of the new Veterans Charter.

Colonel, you basically talk about the lump sum disability problem and Legion representatives focus on that, but also on other things. Colonel, do you agree with the general analysis? Have you heard those things as well, other than the financial problems?

● (1205)

Col Patrick Stogran: Yes, Mr. Chair. In fact, I have heard all of this before in one form or another. One thing with respect to the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman that I'm trying to preserve is our objectivity and our impartiality. I do not want to get drawn into the discussion of the specifics. There are organizations such as ANAVETS, the Legion, and a multitude of other very good organizations that are on the leading edge of the details, and I encourage them to continue in their endeavours.

What I'm trying to establish—and it's being reinforced in my visits—is the philosophical foundation upon which this charter can be built. I use an analogy of shooting a cannon out of a canoe. If we don't have that basis, if we don't understand the ethos of the military and the RCMP mind coming out, these details, sir, you witnessed it yourself.... The veterans become very passionate about such things as the earnings loss clawback, the SISIP clawback, and all of those.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: All of those.

I will focus, then, a little bit on your job as ombudsman because I think that goes part and parcel with the new Veterans Charter. We had concerns on the appointment of the ombudsman. In principle, we like having an ombudsman. We were very concerned about the lack of independence in that it is different from the ombudsman's office at DND; it has a degree of line reporting. I want to get your opinion on whether this is the best model for an ombudsman in this department.

Col Patrick Stogran: Mr. Chair, with all due respect, I really haven't spent too much time looking at alternative models. What I can say is that in my experiences, there have been attempts to try to influence the activities of the office, but I have, in my two and a half years, passed; I have exercised complete independence, I have not been interfered with, and my decisions have not been influenced.

I dare say that any model, if you look at the commissioners who are under legislation.... I've learned a new term since I've been in the public service and it's about "managing up". Really, with the authorities and the acts under which these organizations are created, if a public servant is interested in managing up and looking after their career after their mandate, then I dare say there's no foolproof method.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Have there been any events where it has been suggested by officials, the department, that you not attend? Has there been one?

Col Patrick Stogran: Mr. Chair, no. I can say that categorically. I think the honourable member is referring to a round table that was conducted some months ago during the proroguing of Parliament. It was my decision. I do not enter into events such as this. I'm free for any member of Parliament to discuss the issues, but I will avoid at all costs any sort of air of any kind of political involvement.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Do you answer correspondence from members of Parliament?

Col Patrick Stogran: I'm sorry...?

Mr. Robert Oliphant: If you receive correspondence from a member of Parliament, do you answer them?

Col Patrick Stogran: Mr. Chair, we endeavour to. I must say that we have been overwhelmed by the amount of administration—

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Stogran.

Yes, Mr. McColeman, a point of order.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Through you, Chair, what does this have to do with the relevance of the new Veterans charter, these questions? Could I have an answer for that?

Mr. Robert Oliphant: From me?

The Chair: No, we don't need an answer from Mr. Oliphant.

I would just caution, as we did the last time, to try to get as much material as we can for the new Veterans Charter review, and correspondence isn't under it, so....

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Chair, I understand that Mr. McColeman is raising a point of order. We are indeed straying from the topic at hand, which is the new charter. I would still point out, however, that for several meetings now, Mr. McColeman has also been going off topic, especially in terms of his questions. I do not think his comment about Mr. Oliphant is valid, given the fact that, on the flip side, we do not deal strictly with the veterans charter.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vincent.

I certainly did not penalize anybody. I simply gave a caution to make sure that we got as much information as we could about the new Veterans Charter. It is the procedural obligation of the chair to try to keep us on track, so, Mr. Oliphant, I have—

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I understand.

The Chair: —abided by the time to make sure you have enough.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: For me to put the testimony of the witness into context, it is, frankly, important for me to understand where that is coming from. I understand the Legion's independence. It is well known to all of us and it has been well stated. The office of the ombudsman is less clear. That's why, for me to understand the testimony, I think it's a very fair question, and I'm pleased with the ombudsman's answer. That's not a problem.

But I think it is defensive of the government members, perhaps, to be worried about this, so I would like that on the record as well. The defensiveness, I think, is more concerning to me than the clarification that we are trying to ascertain the nature of the evidence that he is presenting.

With respect to that, does your term have an end point?

•(1210)

Col Patrick Stogran: Mr. Chair, my first mandate comes due on November 11 of this year. I'm anticipating that won't be the end date.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Thank you.

Mr. Allard, thank you for your presentation. What is helpful for me is that you're pointing out to me—I just want to clarify—that the aims and ambitions of the new Veterans Charter are generally agreed to by the veterans' organizations, as well as the Legion, which presented today, but the problems in its implementation seem to be profound. Is that a fair characterization?

Mr. Pierre Allard: I think that would be a fair characterization. Yes.

We are concerned about the implementation. We are concerned about promises that have been made about this living charter concept. We are concerned that it's just taking too much time to come to some rational conclusions.

We are afraid that we're going to see the same trend that we saw with the Gerontological Advisory Council report *Keeping the Promise*, which was trying to simplify the eligibility criteria grids for the health benefits. That came to naught. We now see a report that is in front of the minister, and we would expect that the minister would give us a reply, would give us at least an analysis of some of the issues that we have brought forward.

Some of this work is going on in internal audits. We're worried that they're not coming to the right conclusions when they're looking at these programs. You know, rebranding something from "job placement" to "career transition services" is nonsensical when the success rate is 3% in placing people in jobs, which was the initial objective of this program. Let's focus on what's important: the economic loss benefits, which are too low; the disability award, which is too low; and the fact the disability award is provided as a lump sum when sometimes it should be provided sequentially.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allard.

Thank you, Mr. Oliphant.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Vincent, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Robert Vincent: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Allard, earlier you talked about placement. I want to pick up on that.

Few people have been able to find a job after taking part in a military program. How can we make sure they find a job after training?

Mr. Pierre Allard: The problem has to do with duplication. There is some duplication in terms of employment assistance programs. Veterans Affairs Canada has a program, and the Canadian Forces has another. These programs help people find employment and make the transition from military to civilian life.

Clearly, Veterans Affairs Canada's program does not have the objectives we would like. When you look at the programs of the Canadian Forces, you see that discussions with prospective employers have already taken place for the exact purpose of finding jobs. The way I see it, all of this throws into question the objectives and results that were established when the programs were implemented. Why the duplication?

Mr. Robert Vincent: Do you think it would be easier for these people to find employment? Mr. Stogran told us earlier that it was similar to a situation involving an industrial accident. It can be compared to the situation of people who have suffered an industrial accident. If, after experiencing an industrial accident, they want to find a new job that requires training, they have to find that training themselves and consequently their own employment. If it is a low-paying job, at \$10, \$12 or \$13 an hour, the CSST will pay the difference between their wage prior to the accident and the new one.

Do you think that would make it easier to help them find employment?

•(1215)

Mr. Pierre Allard: I think you also need to consider the objective from another standpoint. There are those who have suffered serious injuries, whether physical or psychological. And despite every attempt to help them reintegrate into society, there is a strong possibility that they may not be capable of doing the job, of embarking on a career other than the one they originally chose.

What measures are there to help these people? There is the lump sum, or the earnings loss benefits program—the name escapes me in French—which provides compensation—

Mr. Robert Vincent: —at 75% of their salary.

Mr. Pierre Allard: —at 75% of their salary. That amount is too low. It was determined based on the salary of a private, the lowest rank in the Canadian Forces, and those individuals with severe injuries, who cannot find employment—

Mr. Robert Vincent: Is the percentage of the salary not based on the person's number of years of service in the Canadian Forces? It is different for someone with one, five or ten years of service. Therefore, it is not possible to establish a minimum salary, as you said.

Mr. Pierre Allard: Most of the people with serious injuries—especially those in Afghanistan right now—are not those in the highest ranking positions. They are not majors or lieutenant-colonels.

Mr. Robert Vincent: What is the average salary?

Mr. Pierre Allard: The average salary is very low for these people.

Mr. Robert Vincent: How much then? \$50,000? \$60,000? At \$30,000, that is not even the minimum salary.

Mr. Pierre Allard: \$40,000.

And if they receive their benefits through an IPSC—another program, the insurance program—the compensation provided by Veterans Affairs Canada is deducted from their IPSC benefits. There again, you have duplication.

Why have both programs, when you need one that is more structured?

Mr. Robert Vincent: There are two programs because one is for those who are still in the Canadian Forces, and the other is for veterans who have made a claim. Take, for example, someone who leaves the Canadian Forces and who, three years later, realizes that their level of post-traumatic stress is higher and so files a claim. That person is then subject to the other charter.

Mr. Pierre Allard: In those cases, the person may receive an increase in their lump-sum payment, in their disability award, but they will not receive an adjustment equivalent to 75% of their salary. That is what we are talking about here. Is 75% enough? No. Does the 75% program do the same thing as another SISIP program? Yes.

Mr. Robert Vincent: That is clearer. Now I understand.

Mr. Stogran, according to your annual report last year, for 2008-2009, you had difficulty collecting information. It had to do with unlimited access in terms of the veterans charter analysis. Was there an improvement? Is it better? Do you have more information on that?

Furthermore, as you know, there is a review and appeal board that hears cases. Should the board's decisions—we know it is an administrative board that holds public hearings—be made public? That is the case with all boards in Quebec. All decisions are available on the Internet. This would make it possible to see the case law that the panel relied on in making its decisions. As things stand now, we have no insight into that. We do not know how the panel comes to its decisions. In my view, it is not just you, Mr. Ombudsman, who should have access to that information, but the public as well. It would help in terms of making submissions and seeing what was said in previous cases.

[English]

Col Patrick Stogran: Mr. Chair, regarding the sharing of information, it's still problematic; however, we are making inroads with the department. We're in the process now of creating a memorandum of understanding with respect to the sharing of information.

Regarding the transparency of the tribunal, Mr. Chair, one of the hallmarks that I established for our office from day one was transparency. I believe that complete and total transparency for any arm of government is a very useful thing, especially in the case of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stoffer.

Thank you, Mr. Vincent.

I just want to clarify with regard to your answer to Mr. Vincent. The MOU that you're talking about, is that for privacy purposes?

Col Patrick Stogran: No, Mr. Chair. We don't have any power to compel the department to provide us with information regarding such things as homelessness, so we came to an understanding that in order for me to have any credibility as an ombudsman there will be a sharing of information, within certain restrictions, which we'll agree to in advance.

But we will preserve privacy and act in accordance with the Privacy Act, and any security of information will be preserved, as will our own level of confidentiality. I hope that answers your question.

The Chair: That was what I was concerned about. Thank you very much.

Mr. Stoffer, for five minutes.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much, gentlemen, for coming.

I want to focus my comments mostly on the facts of the long-term health benefits for World War II and Korean War veterans, and those modern-day veterans, and those that fall under the charter.

We were at Ste. Anne's Hospital the other week and noticed one of the wings was closed because of lack of clientele. The reality is that we have many post-World War II and Korean War veterans who unfortunately are in their late seventies now and don't have access to these beds because of the current regulation.

Colonel Stogran, you indicated that World War II and Korean War veterans have access to those beds, but the reality is that not all of them have access to those beds. They have to meet pretty strict criteria, which I've always found rather unfortunate, because they basically classify who gets in and who doesn't.

So that's my first question for you, sir. With the rapid decline of our World War II and Korean War heroes because of the aging process—I think figures show that we lose anywhere from 90 to 100 a day in this country—and that of the RCMP veterans, wouldn't it make at least compassionate sense that these modern-day veterans, post-1953, should have access to long-term beds like those at Camp Hill, the Perley, Ste. Anne's, etc., etc.?

I say that because yesterday we got a news release from London, Ontario, that Parkwood is shutting down 36 beds in the fall and 36 more next year. That's 72 beds that will be gone, and people will be laid off. This is happening right across the country. My fear is that when the last Korean War veteran dies, there will be no types of beds like this for veterans, and that in a pseudo-sense, basically, the government would be transferring that responsibility onto the backs of the provinces. I'd like both of you to comment, please. I do thank you both very much for that.

I have one slight statement on this. With regard to the delay, Mr. Allard, of the report from the aging council back from DVA, I agree with you that you should have had a response by now. But in fairness to the department, they have just received a new minister, Jean-Pierre Blackburn. Is part of the delay possibly to give the minister a chance to get up to speed on this particular problem before a comprehensive response is sent to you? I just say that in fairness to the department.

Thank you.

Col Patrick Stogran: Mr. Chair, first, regarding the availability of long-term care to Canadian Forces veterans, one of the philosophical principles that should be retained throughout this discussion of the new Veterans Charter is that the commitment of the service person and his or her family to Canada's wars has not changed since the Second World War. I say "Canada's wars" because any time we send our national treasures overseas to die for this country, it becomes Canada's war, whosever war it is; we may not have declared it, but we own it.

All that is to say that the commitment of our soldiers, sailors, and air force personnel—and indeed, police officers now—who go over to Canada's wars has not changed. What has changed is the commitment of the Government of Canada, first of all, to those wars, and secondly, to the veterans. It's very clear in the case of priority access and contract beds that the intention is that it's a sunset program.

I was approached by the department to seek my support for and my endorsement of the closing of Ste. Anne's. From a business case point of view, it's hard to refute the closing down of Ste. Anne's, but I'm not in this job to settle short-term budget problems. My concern is strategic. They hold up as an example the other veterans hospitals that have been closed down, yet the beds in the communities are successful programs.

But as we've witnessed in the last couple of days, once the infrastructure is gone, it's very easy to quietly close down beds and cease contracts, and then, when the people who have served valiantly in these so-called peacekeeping missions, as well as the Cold War, become old and fragile and are in need, the precedent, the relationship that they forged in their blood with the Government of Canada, will be abrogated and passed down to the provinces to look after.

Does that answer the question?

• (1225)

The Chair: Mr. Allard.

Mr. Pierre Allard: First, in regard to the long-term care, I have to go back to the Gerontological Advisory Council report, *Keeping the Promise*. We were trying to address access to long-term care for modern veterans in the context of that report.

The compromise from the veterans organizations providing advice to the department was that we should at least give access to those modern veterans who are medically released or those who have served in a special duty area. That would also have helped simplify some of the eligibility grids. Unfortunately, the department did not see fit, basically, to even reply to the recommendations of their chosen council.

That then brings me to the second point. Because we saw really no reply and no action on *Keeping the Promise*, we are worried about the fact that the New Veterans Charter Advisory Group recommendations will also be dropped into a void. We also know that this report, even though it has stamped on it "October 2009", was really provided to the department in June 2009. The officials were being consulted throughout the making of this report so they should have been ready to reply to the recommendations enclosed in the report.

I'll give the benefit of the doubt to the minister, but because of those instances, the lack of response on *Keeping the Promise* and the fact that the report has been with the department since June, we can only ask the question: what is the delay? Keep in mind the fact that we were promised all along that this was a living charter, that when gaps were identified, solutions would be found.

We're not trying to attack the department here. We realize that the department is doing a good job.

From *Legion Magazine*, I'd like to quote a veteran who says:

I come under the Veterans Affairs Canada office in Peterborough, Ont. From my experience this must be the finest group of civil servants anywhere! As an example, as soon as they found out that my wife had fallen and broken her hip, they called to see if I required additional help

They are a fine group of civil servants, but there is obviously some lack of being able to give a response to things that are crucial and critical to the care of veterans.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Allard and Mr. Stogan.

Only Mr. Stoffer and I were here for your initial presentation, so we're the only two who would know what you mean when you say "so-called peacekeeping missions". You'd have to brief everybody else offline directly to let them know your feelings on that.

Mr. Kerr, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I think we get the drift.

I do want to welcome both of you. We appreciate your being here.

I want to go first to Mr. Allard's comments. I know how passionate he feels, because we've had a chance to chat before about getting on with the job. I think it's important as we wrap up our process with the recommendations to keep in mind that one of the things the department is looking forward to is getting the recommendations that this committee is going to provide as part of that change. I don't know whether that impacts the timing or not, but I think it's really important to get in the additional information that's coming forward.

There are a lot of issues out there. There's no question about it. From our side, I have to say that there has been a lot of progress at the same time, along with the frustrations. I want to make sure that when we're through we're all trying to improve—not change because we were frustrated at this point or whatever. The long-term result has to be of benefit.

First, Mr. Stogan, I'm certainly glad to have you back. I know that you're continuing your work, and there are calmer days now, I guess, so you're getting on without difficulty. I think that probably what you're finding is a bit unique, which is good for all of us, and that is that your contacts and so on are direct. I'd like to just pursue that for a moment.

I know that last year the main topic seemed to be homeless veterans, but in your review and your studies you're probably finding other things that you want the committee to be aware of. You were very succinct in your presentation. I wonder if you'd like to add to the kinds of things that we as a committee should be aware of as we make our recommendations back to the charter process.

• (1230)

Col Patrick Stogan: Thank you very much for that question, Mr. Chair.

Regarding the charter and the discussion that my colleague engaged in regarding how long a piece of string is—and I say that in all seriousness regarding the discussion of what the earnings loss benefit should be—I think that fundamentally another philosophical principle has been lost in this discussion, and that's the move towards a needs-based approach for veterans. In the case of a needs-based approach, whatever the veteran really needs should be the salary or the earnings loss benefit that is provided to them.

For a couple of years, a keystone document that was promoted as leading the move towards the needs-based approach was the health care review. But in our records, and in our research, we found no reference to the health care review in the last two years. Apparently that was on the leading edge of the needs-based philosophy, but what we're seeing within the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman is that they are clinging to the old entitlements approach.

Young Corporal Kerr is a triple-amputee living in Sudbury today, starting off a young family. I would submit that if we truly had a needs-based approach to looking after our veterans, and if his case manager got to know him and understand his needs and got to know how hard-working young Corporal Kerr is in terms of getting back on his feet again, then if it came to the point that his children were of university age and he'd been working enough but couldn't put them through and needed some help, the system should be there to pick up the ball in that case.

I feel that anybody who signs up for a career in the Canadian Forces or the RCMP, regardless of the fact that they may meet an early demise, has certain career expectations. They expect that their career will provide them and their families certain things throughout their life. I would submit that in a truly needs-based approach to business, if a service person's life is cut short or their quality of life is severely degraded by a debilitating accident, there should be a reasonable expectation that those needs will still be provided for.

I just want to make the point of the importance of going back to the original philosophies upon which this is based. If we don't have the needs-based approach right, then I would submit that the whole new Veterans Charter would be in need of a complete rethinking with regard to the programs.

Mr. Greg Kerr: Thank you. You're actually getting back to the philosophical stage, the basis itself, instead of just perhaps adjusting it. It's a matter of what the adjustments are based on. Am I getting that correct?

Col Patrick Stogran: Yes, sir.

Mr. Greg Kerr: Thank you.

Mr. Allard, I know that your involvement has been pretty steady for a long time, and I know what recommendations came out of the review committee. I'm not going to ask you again to prioritize them. We went through that and we didn't get very far with that one. I am going to ask, though, whether in your thinking over the last several months you have come up with anything that should also be considered beyond those specific recommendations.

Mr. Pierre Allard: I think my colleague, the ombudsman, has pointed one out, and I did so also, by inference. I think long-term care is something that is not built into the new Veterans Charter.

My colleague has also identified another one that is not built in. It is that the funeral and burial benefits that need to be improved substantially and also need to be made available to the new modern veteran. That is something that has not been done in the context of the recommendations.

The funeral and burial benefits, especially, are of large concern, because I think what happened is that it did not come true as a recommendation. At that time, there were basically two funnels going up. One was dealing with providing services and one was dealing with commemoration. These funnels have now been brought together in the department, but at the time the recommendations came forward, there was still this disparity.

If you will allow me to talk about philosophy, we were talking about earnings loss benefit. We were discussing what salary level we are talking about. The reality is that in the philosophy between the Pension Act and the new Veterans Charter we basically went a very

long way to changing a philosophy, which was that whatever happened to you, what rank you were didn't really make any difference. Your monthly disability pension would be the same whether you were a private, a colonel, or a general. We have respected that philosophy in the disability award, the same way that SISIP respects that philosophy in accidental dismemberment.

You will be talking to Bruce Henwood in the coming days. He is the champion who in 2003 resolved the fact that accidental dismemberment was provided for only at a certain level, for colonels and generals. He brought it forward for the same level at all rank levels.

But when we look at the disability awards and the earnings loss benefit, because we've espoused the SISIP approach to providing earnings loss, we capped it at rank levels. So keep that in mind when you're talking about how we can improve these benefits that are included in the new Veterans Charter.

● (1235)

Mr. Greg Kerr: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kerr.

Now we'll go to Madam Sgro for five minutes.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Thank you both for being here.

Mr. Allard, it's nice to see you again.

Mr. Stogran, I first have to tell you how great it is to see how strongly committed you are to the important job you have as the ombudsman. In our work, we continue to meet so many veterans and families in the military who continue to raise issues that we are all trying to deal with here as a committee to make life better. Clearly, your commitment to them is to be applauded.

Are you receiving the reports now? Are you receiving all of the reports you require or is that going to require the MOU in order to get it done, to get that support?

Col Patrick Stogran: Mr. Chair, that's a very difficult question for me to answer, because fundamentally I don't know what information the department holds on the various issues. We encountered that. It has been a learning experience, but we encountered that with the homeless issue, for example. We went through the process of an access to information request, because as an ombudsman I don't mind information being withheld from me if I know it exists, but I'm trying to make a balanced and objective statement on any of the issues that we have.

First and foremost, I have to make sure that I have at least the information that the general public has. We went through that exercise and found that there were thousands of pages of documentation that we had not been privy to. So I think, through this memorandum of understanding, the department recognizes the role of the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman and the service we provide all levels of government in what we do through our town halls and those sorts of things. I'm satisfied that through this memorandum of understanding we'll be afforded at least the level of information sharing that we would get through ATIP.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Is it two years that you've been the ombudsman?

Col Patrick Stogran: Yes, two and a half years. My term is up in November.

Hon. Judy Sgro: How long before you expect to have this MOU signed? Could the committee get a copy of it when it is completed?

Col Patrick Stogran: Yes, Mr. Chair. Regarding that MOU, we will definitely share it with committee members. I hasten to add, based on an honourable member's question regarding the correspondence that comes out of our office, that we are at the beck and call of any member of Parliament for any of those types of documents or issues or feedback from our town hall meetings. Most certainly, we will provide that information.

I might also add that there has been a steep learning curve in the past two years. This was not a turnkey operation. We were established as a mirror of the DND ombudsman, but we found very much that the challenges we face, the magnitude of the complaints that come our way, and the complexities of many of the issues, are very, very different from those of the DND ombudsman. I think it's safe for me to say that it's been as much a learning experience for the department staff as it has for us.

Hon. Judy Sgro: We had a presentation on Tuesday by a Mr. Zimmerman, who heads up a national disability management organization, and to listen to that model he told us about...

I share the same concern. I think once our men or women put uniforms on and put their lives on the line—I think we all feel the same way—they become the responsibility of the government. It's up to us to see that they are looked after in whatever way is necessary. When we talk about a needs-based plan, it's everything, starting with helping them to be placed in jobs so that they're contributing in whatever capacity they're able to contribute.

I have to say, we were really impressed—I should speak for myself, but I think I speak for the committee—with the way that model worked. He was presenting it as a model of how we should be dealing with many of our veterans, and I found it fascinating. The commitment and the care going into everything he said showed that British Columbia and various organizations were clearly putting their people first to make sure that they have adequate jobs and that whole strength of feeling that they were doing.

I'd like to get some comments back from you on that issue. In case the chair cuts me off, could I ask about what happened to the health care review? You've mentioned it. I've been here almost two years now, I think, and I haven't seen it or heard about it. Can someone let me know where we are with that health care review? What happened to it?

• (1240)

Mr. Pierre Allard: As far as I know, it has disappeared. This is something that has been actually going on at the department since 2002. The report, *Keeping the Promise*, from the GAC, was really the ultimate conclusion of some very hard work.

If you don't mind, I'd like to talk about the needs-based approach, because it brings forward another point of discussion we were having before the honourable members came.

In a needs-based approach, you realize that when you do the costing, you don't need to do the costing for 100% of the people coming forward to tap services. You probably need to do the costing

for between 12% and 14% of the people who will need the services. In that instance, it facilitates being able to project what the financial demands will be for certain programs. There's a problem with doing financial estimates when you're trying to fund 100%. This is a problem, I think, not only for the Conservative government, but for other MPs, which has to be resolved at the source.

This was the fundamental framing of the *Keeping the Promise* report. We realized that only 12% to 14% of the people would come and get services. If you look at the slide that was given to you by the ombudsman, you can see that the number of clients who are in place in Veterans Affairs is 58,000 clients—modern veterans—out of a total pool of 592,000. The figures speak for themselves. When you do costing with a needs-based approach, you don't need to cost to 100%.

The Chair: Mr. Allard, Madam Sgro was right. We need to move on to another speaker now.

We'll go on to Mr. Lobb for five minutes.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll split my time with Mr. McColeman.

The question I have has to do with job placement and job placement within Veterans Affairs. Mr. Bruyey was here a meeting or two ago and mentioned a certain percentage of jobs within Veterans Affairs being allotted for actual veterans. Of course, I'm not saying that it has to be a certain percentage.

Mr. Stogran, you mentioned in your statement that if you haven't worn the uniform, it's very difficult to understand. I just wondered if you could give the committee some thoughts on the value of having more veterans working in Veterans Affairs, perhaps. Maybe there are some options—not necessarily having a requirement for a university degree but having a nice system set up to put some equivalencies in there.

Col Patrick Stogran: Yes, Mr. Chair, regarding the employment of veterans in Veterans Affairs, I think quotas of any sort are counterproductive. I would submit that the culture at Veterans Affairs Canada is broken, despite the best efforts of a lot of good people working on behalf of veterans.

It's very much an insurance company approach to doing business. I dare say that veterans of service in the military and RCMP are experts at following orders, and if they are thrown into that kind of a culture, they are going to follow orders. Culture is bigger than any individual.

I feel very strongly that the culture has to change. I feel very strongly that to do that it has to go towards a needs-based approach. I also feel very strongly that in order to satisfy that needs-based approach, case managers on the front lines have to be empowered to offer veterans what they really need. I think that's the principle upon which this program is based.

Now, having said that, veterans do add a certain colour. I think that 30% of our staff within the office are veterans at various rank levels. They offer a different outlook on life to the young entry-level professionals who are on our staff.

They also have a certain degree of credibility when dealing with veterans, particularly problem veterans. There have been occasions within our organization where my staff have had me phone veterans and I have said to veterans, "If you behaved like that in the Canadian Forces, we would have thrown you out for being an administrative burden". There's a joint responsibility here. No civilian can get away with that. So I think there's a blend.

I'd like to address the piece about education because it is a significant problem. Yes, there is priority afforded to Canadian Forces people who are medically released in terms of employment, but that education piece is sadly missing. It's an imperative at many levels of government, and the new Veterans Charter is sadly lacking in that. I've had young soldiers who aspire to obtain their Ph.D. so they can get involved in things like international relations and such, but who are offered a token two years towards a bachelor's degree. Then they're on their own.

We should be rewarding ambition and commitment, and for people coming out of the Canadian Forces, yes, that priority to public service is very important, but we should be setting the conditions whereby they can actually take advantage of it.

• (1245)

The Chair: Okay. You have a minute and a half.

Mr. Phil McColeman: I'm passing my time to Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for coming here today, gentlemen. I'll be quick.

I would like to go further into Mr. Oliphant's questions to you, Mr. Stogran. Under your job, is it appropriate for you to attend any partisan political fundraisers?

Col Patrick Stogran: Mr. Chair, fundamentally, I will not get involved in anything partisan. I am at the disposal of any of our senior leadership to help them understand the plight of our veterans, but I will not be involved in any way, shape, or form in the politicking piece.

Mr. Brian Storseth: It would be very inappropriate, would it not, under your position?

Col Patrick Stogran: Yes—short answer.

Mr. Brian Storseth: As well, any partisan political photo ops would be inappropriate for you or your office to participate in, would they not?

Col Patrick Stogran: I... That's—

Mr. Brian Storseth: I'm just asking if it would be inappropriate for you or your office to be involved knowingly in a partisan political photo op—

Col Patrick Stogran: I would have to seek a definition of a "partisan photo opportunity". If it's being photographed with somebody from another party, I don't care if they're NDP, Conservative, Liberal, black, white, or whatever—

Mr. Brian Storseth: That's not the question. I'm not accusing you of anything. I'm simply suggesting that these things would be inappropriate. Have you ever been asked during prorogation to attend what you felt was a partisan event?

Col Patrick Stogran: Mr. Chair, yes. And no, I did not attend.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I would like to thank you for your judgment on that. I think it's important that your office continue to be non-partisan and to serve the men and women and the veterans of our Canadian Forces and the RCMP. I'd like to thank you, on behalf of the committee, for maintaining that non-partisanship.

I also, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I'd find it highly inappropriate to be pressuring these gentlemen, at committee, to be attending those things.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Storseth.

Monsieur André, pour cinq minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Good afternoon, sir. It is a pleasure to meet you.

According to your Web site, you are conducting a study right now. You have undertaken public consultations on the single lump sum versus the monthly pension. Where are you at in your research? Why are you doing this study? Have you received a number of complaints and questions about it? I would like to hear your comments on that.

In addition, many veterans have appeared before the committee, and they have often said that it was difficult to access certain services, especially in rural areas. In remote areas, veterans were often very isolated and did not have access to services.

As someone who used to be in the health sector, I wondered about something. Do you think it would be beneficial to reorganize services, to cooperate more with health stakeholders in certain regions and to expand ties so as to better support veterans in more remote areas? We heard from individuals who had suffered from post-traumatic stress, and I was quite shocked to learn that, according to certain studies, these people had very high rates of separation and family problems, as a result. There seems to be a lack of regard in that respect. Should there not be more support and follow-up in terms of these situations?

• (1250)

[English]

Col Patrick Stogran: Mr. Chair, very quickly, regarding the lump sum, it's a hugely contentious issue. I've stated my belief that it's wrong to hand over a lump sum to an individual. As a retired army officer, I would submit that it's wrong to offer a person the choice between a pension and a lump sum.

Throughout my career, I have exercised tough love, and you do what's best for the individual, because, very often, a young soldier coming back from Afghanistan will opt for the cash in hand. So we have to be thinking about that person and the rest of their life; otherwise, they could become a ward of the state as a frail veteran.

The availability of service for veterans is indeed a national problem—and also for civilians. It's very difficult. Many of our veterans want to retire to where they came from and the services just aren't available there. I would submit, however, that Veterans Affairs Canada should take a leadership role in the provision of services, much as it did after World War I and World War II.

Although there was an honourable member of Parliament associated with universal health care, I often say there were veterans hospitals across this country that were providing universal health care, and it was a very easy inference to make that all Canadians should have that. I think Veterans Affairs Canada should be taking a leadership role in trying to improve the services to veterans in remote areas and setting an example for the various provinces that may be having problems in providing health services for our veterans.

And the last question was on PTSD...?

Mr. Guy André: Yes.

Col Patrick Stogran: Once again, Mr. Chair, PTSD and operational stress injuries are a significant problem. I disagree with labelling or treating everyone as an invalid because they've been diagnosed with an operational stress injury. I have been diagnosed with PTSD, and there is an honourable senator who has been diagnosed with PTSD, and we've managed to carry on with our lives.

What I would say also is that stress problems, mental health issues, are of huge proportions within civilian society. I think that Veterans Affairs should become very engaged in the veterans community, as a small focus group of Canadians, with a view to taking a leadership role in setting standards and perhaps pioneering ways of looking after people with stress injuries or mental health problems.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stogran.

Thank you, Mr. André.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Do I still have some time left?

[English]

The Chair: No, that's your time.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I just have a point of order. Because there seemed to be some accusations of something nefarious, either on my part or the retired colonel's part, I want to clarify that on January 9, 2010, Juliet O'Neill of Canwest News Service reported, perhaps inaccurately, that the ombudsman said that he would attend our round table. That's a matter of public record. He said he would not provide any political sound bites at that point. When we held the round table, he was not able to come.

I simply want to clarify this, because he had said to a reporter, and it was reported in the news media—you get your news clips, so you probably read it as well—that he would come. I just want to clarify that he had indeed independently changed his mind on coming, which is his right, and I respect him for that; I wanted to ensure that

there was no political interference. That is simply what I wanted to do and I would hope the other members would accept that it was what I was trying to do.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Oliphant. That wasn't really a point of order.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair—

• (1255)

The Chair: If it's on this point of debate, I don't know if I want to it carry on, but—

Mr. Brian Storseth: —I wanted to congratulate the ombudsman for maintaining non-partisanship. I wanted to make it clear to this committee that he did maintain that non-partisanship and also make it clear that it was inappropriate for the Liberal Party of Canada to invite the ombudsman to a political event.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Storseth.

My point remains.

Now, Mr. McColeman, we're down to two minutes.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Yes, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

I'm trying to understand the needs-based approach from, I suppose, a business background, because I think it could be a significant contribution to the report we come up with. So I'm going to ask you to briefly comment and help me. It seems that a needs-based approach would be different for almost every individual in the needs being assessed. How do you project what those needs might be?

I mean, to me, there would obviously have to be some parameters and thresholds for awards. There would have to be different things in order to project financial responsibility on something like this. I accept your numbers in terms of the percentages of people, and I understand that you can quantify that, but to me, what would be very difficult to quantify for is the person whose needs are that they have six children who all want to go to university to get a Ph.D. How would it be for an individual who has no children and wants to do that?

In this model, I guess I'm asking you two things. One, do models for this type of system exist in other countries in terms of how their systems are set up? Two, if not, are there other models you could direct us to?

Col Patrick Stogran: Mr. Chair, as I said earlier, as the ombudsman I'm trying to avoid getting involved in the actual fixing of the new Veterans Charter at this point. We have not investigated the approaches of other like-minded nations.

I would very briefly submit, if I may, that in terms of the needs-based approach, you can't have it both ways. It has to be either a needs-based approach or an eligibility-based approach to which you have to commit totally.

I would suggest that caseworkers on the front line really have to become case managers. They have to know the person. They have to be able to say that if you work hard enough and commit to this, they will look after you.

Conversely, they need to have the wherewithal to suggest, as I did on occasion with other veterans, that if you were in the Canadian Forces, they wouldn't tolerate this type of behaviour. Perhaps they need to have, as we have in the Canadian Forces, a recorded warning, counselling, and probation. They will no longer support you unless you clean up your act. Once again, it's tough love.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Can I interject?

The Chair: Actually, I have another committee to go to, and I know Madam Sgro has a brief request.

I'd like to thank the witnesses—

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Allard wanted to respond.

Mr. Pierre Allard: I'd like to add that *Keeping the Promise* had a model, a screening tool that is in place in the Province of Quebec to determine the needs.

The Chair: Madam Sgro.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Chair, the health care review was again raised today. Given the fact that it has an impact on the issue of needs, which is going to form part of our report, can we have somebody from the department come to address where they are with the health care review? It's going to have an impact on the charter and everything that we're doing.

The Chair: The researcher tells me that we will have witnesses who can address that on Thursday of next week.

Hon. Judy Sgro: That's great.

The Chair: Mr. Stogran and Mr. Allard, I want thank you very much. Thank you for testifying here and thank you for your good service to veterans.

The meeting is adjourned.

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