



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

ACVA



NUMBER 072



1st SESSION



41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, May 23, 2013



Chair

Mr. Greg Kerr

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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC)): We're at that magic hour. We look forward to continuing the discussion on the act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament, particularly clauses 156 to 160.

We very much welcome from the Korea Veterans Association of Canada, the national president, Mr. John Bishop. He assures me he's going to be very direct, and we'll certainly understand the comments and advice he has.

We look forward to that, sir, and once you've finished your presentation, the committee will be asking you some questions. Thank you for coming and welcome.

Mr. John Bishop (National President, Korea Veterans Association of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Do you want me to start now?

The Chair: Absolutely, please.

Mr. John Bishop: Thank you very much, honourable members. I am very privileged to be here.

I hope that I stay on subject and contribute something. When I wrote up my introduction, I wasn't too sure, although Cynara Corbin was very excellent in giving me some guidance.

As you probably know, there are not that many Korean veterans around anymore. About 60% have passed away, and there are more funerals than I can make time to go to. It's really quite interesting. I'm quite lucky, because I'll be around for a while yet, because only the good die young.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Bishop: In the Korean War, 516 Canadians were killed and 1,558 were wounded. It was Canada's third-bloodiest conflict after World War I, which was the most severe, and World War II, which was number two.

This year, when the 60th anniversary of the war is being celebrated, we're not the vets we were 60 years ago. I'm 82 and I served in Korea in 1951, starting off at 19 years of age. We consider World War II vets who served in Korea to be very special, and believe it or not, in our battalion we had five Hong Kong veterans, who went through Hong Kong and then signed up for Korea. That's quite amazing when you think of it. I fortunately was invited to their "last hurrah"—if you want to call it that—and it was very interesting, because I was the only non-Kapyong veteran invited.

Many of us are not able to complete complex or even relatively simple tasks as effectively as we could a few years ago or decades ago. In fact, I find that it's very interesting to communicate with many of the veterans I deal with, because I've been with a unit in KVA and I have 50 subunits—I even have trouble figuring out where they all are—but it's getting more difficult all the time.

Many of the vets have lost their wives and/or companions, and that does make it bad.

I'll tell you what I think is a funny little story. A lot of people who have lost their wives or their girlfriends get a new girlfriend and they bring her to our meetings, and somebody says, "How come you picked a girl who isn't as good looking as your wife or your first girlfriend?" And he says, "She has her driver's licence." We have reduced the number of our nighttime functions because of reduced driving ability. In British Columbia, you have to be very careful, because there seems to be a little thing going on now so that if you look old in your car, you're going to be stopped and checked.

I'm lucky to be the last president of Fourandex in Canada. Most of you have never heard of that. That was created in 1923, three years before the Legion was, and you had to have served in the trenches in World War I to belong to it. Then they went along and they allowed some navy to join it and some air force. Then they really got up—they even allowed about half a dozen Korean War veterans to belong to it.

I meet those people, and it's very interesting because the last unit is in Victoria—and they voted me to be their last president. That surprised me, and it's very interesting to learn what happens to people when they're in their nineties. In fact, some of them are 95 and 96, and they don't even bother trying to get benefits anymore, because of the struggle and their age. I think you might consider that sometimes, that when people get over 85 or so, a lot of them just say, "To hell with it," and they probably don't make the ambitious try they would have made a few years before.

• (0850)

General health issues are a problem for Korean War veterans, very much so. Memory loss—believe it or not we used to be able to do everything and not have to write it down. Now we all carry what we call a brain book to keep track of all the different things that are on, such as to find this place this morning.

A lot of the veterans who served in Gagetown and in Vietnam, as I did, were sprayed with Agent Orange. I was sprayed four times in Gagetown in an Agent Orange area. What goes wrong? What is your ailment? It's very difficult to say what the problem is. I saw one of my doctors the other day and I'm in relatively good shape for an old guy. My doctor was quite frank. It really affects your kidneys. He said that I may not die for five or 10 years, but my kidneys are going to pack it in. He said I had some damage to my kidneys.

I'm not trying to make myself feel like a poor guy or anything. I'm trying to tell you what the Korean War veterans are suffering from. I happened to serve in 10 countries, but some served in more difficult postings and they're not well and they have problems. For example, part of my kidney deterioration is due to dehydration during my service in Korea and Ghana, West Africa. In Korea we didn't get water for days when we were on top of some of the mountains. It was good in the winter even if the snow was three-feet deep because you could drink the snow, but in the summer months it could be a real problem. We often drank water from the ditches of the rice paddies. What that did to us, I don't know.

I had malaria twice. Millions have died of malaria. I got malaria just after I returned from Korea, and when I was in Ghana I got my second bash of malaria. I point this out not to make you feel sorry for me. I say it again that sometimes Korean War veterans who served in many places, including Korea, had the old business of malaria. I don't think when we came back that they were too interested in what happened during the Korean War because it was only five years after World War II, and nothing was bigger than that.

Generally speaking, we Korean vets do not expect special consideration over other veterans who have served overseas, but age is a significant factor in our lives. We require more help, not less, and looking at all the veterans I know—I know more than the names I can remember—there's no question that they are of the age that they don't even bother if they know they have something serious and they know it was caused by their service. They are just of the age where they can't be bothered even applying because a lot of them are being turned down.

In conclusion, to demonstrate that veterans do not always get automatic recognition or benefit for their contribution, I have a couple of points to make. On my return from Korea in 1951 with one medal at that time, a World War II vet asked me what medal I was wearing. I said, "Korea". He asked if they now gave medals for peacekeeping. That was this medal here. That was the only one we wore when we first came back. It was the only authorized medal.

When we in 2 PPCLI were awarded the United States presidential citation for the Battle of Kapyong in April 1951...and I have a postcard here that some of you might like to look at because it's a painting by a Korea veteran who didn't serve in Kapyong. It's the Kapyong picture. As a matter of fact, when I woke up after about 35 or 40 hours without sleep and I opened my eyes in my trench—it wasn't a trench, just a parapet built of rocks because it was a rock surface, so we couldn't dig—what's in that picture was the first thing I saw, an aircraft flying over because a lot of our companies had run out of ammunition, water, and food. That's enough about that.

● (0855)

By the way, I should mention we became the only unit awarded this recognition in Canadian history, this one right here. It was six years before we were authorized to wear this citation. I understood. I never felt bitter about it because World War II vets who were in charge—and I'm not against World War II vets—thought we shouldn't even get it because "nobody else has received it, why should you get it?" But we felt pretty proud because we were surrounded for about two days by 6,000 to 3,000 Chinese and we managed to hold them off. The most interesting thing there, just so I don't overstate it, was that the Chinese ran out of artillery shells and that's probably the only thing that saved us.

Anyway, that's my introduction. It's not the full 10 minutes. But I just wanted to make sure that you had a bit of understanding, and it may not even be what you wanted to hear.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bishop. I couldn't help but notice when you said you need a brain book to find this place. There are a lot of MPs who could probably use that kind of assistance right now who are a lot younger than you are.

A voice: I agree.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. John Bishop: I won't put that in the newspaper.

The Chair: We'll now begin our rounds of questions. We start with Mr. Chicoine.

You have five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Bishop, thank you for joining us. Given your sense of humour and quick wit, I have no doubt that the Korean War veterans are very well represented. In addition, you have received several medals. I thank you for and congratulate you on your contribution.

You talked at length about health care. So I have a question about that.

Committee members have often said that the allowance was a better way to help the poorest veterans. Now that the transfer of the last hospital is looming, I would like you to tell us how satisfied you are with the level of health care provided to Korean War veterans. Moreover, are you concerned about the future of long-term health care?

● (0900)

[*English*]

Mr. John Bishop: Thank you very much. By the way, I have a hearing aid. I lost my hearing in Korea and Vietnam and I hear nothing above 900 cycles. So this changes some of the frequency, and I heard your question. Of course when I came back from Korea, I tried to take a French course, and they said, "How come you're still in the armed forces? You shouldn't even be in the armed forces with your hearing. Get the hell out of the French course". So I never did learn how to speak French. I tried.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Bishop: As I understand your question, because I was listening to the French and the English, what you're interested in is how are we treated for our disabilities as retirees, now. Is that basically what you'd like to know?

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Yes, among other things.

I would also like to know what you think about the health care provided. Are you worried about the future of long-term health care available to Korean War veterans?

[English]

Mr. John Bishop: Generally speaking, because of the circumstances when we first came back from Korea, we didn't even count. It was many a long time before we got the same benefits as World War II veterans. A lot of people lost interest and wouldn't even try to get them.

Of course, when they get older and they have a disability and they're spread all across Canada.... For example, in British Columbia, where I live, the veterans are spread throughout the province. When we have a meeting, it takes some people four days to drive in, get organized, come to the meeting, and go back. So they give up.

First of all, I would say most veterans don't even bother trying to apply because they've been turned down from the early days. I'm not saying it's all bad now. It is trying to change; there's no question about that. It is getting better, so I don't want to say that it's terrible now.

I would also say there's the other factor. The first battalion that I was with that went to Korea, for about six months before the brigade arrived we were Canadian army special force. We joined up for 18 months. Many of them served longer than some of the veterans did in World War II who only fought in Europe, because they did 13 months or so in Korea before they were brought home.

Then they got out of the forces and disappeared into the fabric of society. Now that sounds impossible, but from D-Day until the end of the war, they served longer than people served in World War II in combat. I'm not trying to overstate it. I'm just saying that's a fact. A lot of those people are not even interested. They don't even join KVA. We're not even able to find them to take them back to Korea on a revisit, with half their airfare and all of their expenses paid for by the Korean government.

Remember now, somebody aged 85 to 90 wonders why in the hell should they bother. There's a lot who don't even try, and they should, because there's an amazing number who cannot walk properly now. They've had a couple of hip operations. They've had a knee operation. Their health is not very good. But those who have assistance and do apply.... A lot of service officers who are serving with the Royal Canadian Legion help the Korean veterans, and they are a great help in getting people assistance for some of their problems.

I would support a statement that says not everything that's wrong with them is likely due to the Korean War. But I can tell you right now that almost all veterans, without question, only apply because of

the way they look at it. There are things that were caused in Korea, such as climbing a mountain in the ice and the snow and losing a grip and falling 500 feet. Boom, boom, all the way down. I've seen it happen.

Generally speaking, Korean veterans only apply if they have a real problem.

I don't know if I've answered your question the way you—

● (0905)

The Chair: I think that will have to cover it for now. That's the time allotment for the first questioner.

We'll turn to our second questioner, Mr. Hayes, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, Mr. Bishop, thank you very much for your service. Secondly, thank you for your presentation. You said you weren't sure if this is what we wanted to hear. It's exactly what we wanted to hear. It was really well done, so thank you very much.

As you know, the war veterans allowance is being amended to exclude the disability pension from calculations of the allowance provided to a veteran. This is a step that I think will provide great financial assistance and increased benefits to Canadian war veterans who fought in the Korean War.

Would the members of your organization agree with that statement?

Mr. John Bishop: Yes, no question about it. They would agree with that statement.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Thank you.

With the 60th anniversary of the Korean War armistice coming up this summer, are you pleased with these legislative amendments—you, yourself—which will increase the eligibility for the war veterans allowance to more Korean War veterans, and would you hope that all political parties would pass economic action plan 2013 before the summer recess so that Korean War veterans will have access to these benefits as soon as possible?

Mr. John Bishop: As you know, I'm not an expert on that whole thing, but I've read it. There's no question in my mind that one of the greatest blows I remember was hearing people discuss the clawback thing that happened a few years ago, where somebody was entitled to something, and then they also got another entitlement, and all of a sudden they said, "You're only going to get so much, so we'll take away part of it." That being cancelled, to me, is one of the greatest steps.

I served with the American forces for quite a bit, and they have real problems along this line, too, with people losing their benefits, or all of a sudden not being recognized. I think that some weeks they have 50 people killing themselves because of their past experiences. In other words, they commit suicide. I don't know how many are doing that in Canada, but there's no question that we feel disappointed when we are not given due consideration.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Do you believe that these proposed changes are an appropriate mechanism to accomplish continued successful implementation of the war veterans allowance with its mandate, which is to provide monthly financial assistance to help low-income veterans or their survivors meet their basic needs?

Mr. John Bishop: Having read a bit of that, I would say that if it happens we would be ecstatic. We could not complain about that because—I don't want to waste time with things I've already said—when we think back to 1950 to 1965, it was the forgotten war, and anything that happened to the Korean veterans was not considered, in my opinion.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: I'm looking forward to returning to my riding this summer because we have a parade organized already, and this is something that's long overdue.

Thank you very much, sir.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We will go to Mr. Casey for five minutes, please.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bishop, welcome.

I am a member of Parliament for Charlottetown. I was one of the members of Parliament who accompanied 36 Korean War vets a month ago to Korea to commemorate the 60th anniversary. I think Neil Finney was the spokesperson there.

Mr. John Bishop: Doug Finney.

Mr. Sean Casey: Doug, yes.

Mr. John Bishop: He's my vice-president.

Mr. Sean Casey: He was accompanied by his son. It was for me, sir, a real eye-opener on many levels.

I understand that you've participated in some revisits there.

There are a couple of the things that struck me. I'll share them with you and then I'll get your comments. One is the amazing progress in South Korea in the last 60 years. It's a world power, the tenth biggest economy in the world.

While the Korean conflict may be named the forgotten war, I can tell you that they didn't forget it. You can see it every day. We went from the demilitarized zone in the north right down to Busan and points in between. The reception that your colleagues got was heartwarming, and not just from political and military folk. When they were wearing the medals and the blazer that you have today, people recognized and realized that they were part of the UN forces that were there 60 years ago. We had school kids lined up clapping for the buses when they went by. While some of your colleagues may feel a certain amount of disrespect, the Koreans certainly don't feel that way. Those were a couple of the things that really struck me. I wanted to say that because I did have the honour of participating in that delegation.

The matter at hand, sir, is clawbacks. You correctly identified that the reason we're discussing these amendments is because of a lawsuit that was brought by Dennis Manuge in Halifax, who fought tooth and nail with the government over five years and eventually won. As a result of that, there are some changes being made, but there are

only some changes being made. This stops certain clawbacks, but there are some that continue.

I realize that you say your organization would be happy to see an end to the clawbacks that are set out in the War Veterans Allowance Act and the Pension Act, but there are other amounts being clawed back. Can we go further? Should we do more?

• (0910)

Mr. John Bishop: Thank you very much.

There is no question that Korean progress is unbelievable. I can remember going to Korea in 1950-51 and most Koreans lived in little shacks with straw roofs or in mud huts. As a matter of fact, when we helped retake Seoul in about February 1951, it was quite unbelievable. There was only one bridge across the Han River at that time, and I think there are now 37. The progress is unbelievable and it really makes you think.

For example, my grandson went back—I didn't select him to go back, he was selected by a committee—and he even spent six days walking along the DMZ with the Korean army. It was quite interesting. When he got home to Canada he called me and said, "Grandpa, you know what? Seoul is a more modern city than Toronto." He had lived in Toronto for a while, but there is no questioning the change.

For example, when we helped retake Seoul, because of casualties and people leaving, the population was 10,000. Today the population of greater Seoul, like greater Vancouver, is 20 million. As I kidded the Koreans, I said, "You're pretty good at one thing".

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Bishop: That's all I'll say on that because I don't want to spend a lot of time.

Getting back to the clawback, etc., as you can appreciate, my knowledge is very limited when it comes to the legal things that are happening. But I think the big thing should be whether the injury that person may have been suffering from for years and had never reported, or which has now come to a head, was caused because of his Korean War service.

I could go on for half an hour telling you things about people who were wounded, etc., and have things wrong with them and they have never even claimed it. I couldn't get a pension for my hearing loss until I had retired from the forces. They just wouldn't give it to me, and then all of a sudden they said, "yes, there is no question, your medical documents prove that." But it hadn't been listened to before that. So I think we should listen and ask: is this attributable to wartime service? Is it unfair in relation to some of the clawbacks that may still be going on?

One thing I should mention again is kidney problems. A very astute doctor said that the only thing that could have caused that damage to your kidneys is rather poor treatment of your kidneys, which is a problem that only happens overseas.

I don't know if that answers your question or not.

• (0915)

Mr. Sean Casey: Thank you, sir.

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

Now we'll go to Mr. Lobb, please.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to Mr. Bishop for your years of service, decades of service, really.

First, I would like to share my time with Mr. O'Toole, who will go first.

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Lobb.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have stolen one minute from my colleague just to thank you, Mr. Bishop, for your engaging presentation and for your service. Your CD with two clasps shows you've given more than 30 years to our country.

I have to say that when I left the forces and joined my Branch 178 of the Royal Canadian Legion, in Bowmanville, it was two of your members, Art Daigle and Jim Armstrong, from KVA Unit 11 in Oshawa, who helped welcome me as a new member of the branch. I used to do Remembrance Day every week.

I just want to put on the record that your organization is an important one. They give a bursary to students in our area. It's truly amazing how your veterans have continued to serve, so thank you.

The Chair: Mr. O'Toole, since Mr. Hayes has only used three and a half minutes, I'll take it off his time and we'll leave Mr. Lobb with five minutes.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Thank you.

My first question is in regard to the changes and the enhancements to the funeral and burial program. I just wonder if you can shed some light and give us your thoughts as to what the enhancement might do for some of your colleagues.

Also, just give us an idea of the number of colleagues of yours whose families actually have had to use the program for their funeral.

Mr. John Bishop: That is a difficult question because every individual is different. For example, thanks to my wife who just retired not too long ago, we have a plan where it's all covered. We even have our burial plots organized for the island. But there are a lot of veterans who were not successful when they came back. Some don't even have pensions. They don't even have any assistance.

The big thing that you mentioned is that if a person has no income and all his relatives have passed away, or his children live a long way away—there are a lot of children because of circumstances....their families don't even talk to them anymore—it's very difficult for them to be looked after.

When you look at somebody who has passed away, who was a Korean veteran, look very carefully at his financial situation and help him. A lot of people don't need any help and don't want any help, but some need assistance, there's no question about it. They should be helped, in my opinion.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I have another question, not necessarily directly related to Bill C-60. Could I get your opinion on the changes we made to the veterans independence program over a year ago? There are two semi-annual allocations instead of consistently submitting your invoices for reimbursement.

What are your members comments on it? Do they think that it's a positive change?

Mr. John Bishop: You're talking about the VIP?

Mr. Ben Lobb: VIP.

Mr. John Bishop: I'm on the VIP, so I'm familiar with it.

For some reason, I still have to submit my receipts. Talking to other veterans—I guess in the transition period—they're still demanding the receipts. The thing I find with that program is.... For example, I have a wood-electric furnace. They won't even tolerate cleaning the chimney because it's not one of the things that's in. Looking after the garden, I have an acre of land, unfortunately. I get that looked after as far as cutting grass, etc. A housekeeper also comes in once or twice a month to really muck the house out.

There's no question that some of the veterans that I know—I know three or four in the Victoria unit—just found the whole thing so difficult, they packed it in and said, "the hell with it". Filling out the request, the VIP application, and getting all the receipts is just a pain when they're in their eighties or getting up to 90.

Now, of course, they're saying they're going to get an allowance. I suppose what they're doing is saying, "You spent \$1,200 or \$1,500 last year. We're going to take that, divide it in half, and give it to you in the first six months and the other half in the next six months." They submit it. I don't know how it's working yet.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Is there any time left?

• (0920)

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I guess my time has run short here. I would just like to thank you again for your service. I often find when we have people such as yourself come to committee it really does honestly provide a lot of interesting comments on your experience, and also real first-hand experience of how government programs, through veterans affairs, either work or don't work, or could be enhanced.

Thank you for taking the time to come out here.

Mr. John Bishop: Thank you very much.

The Chair: By the way, it's a shame Mr. Lobb doesn't live closer. He'd love to work your acre with his little tractor. He's too far away.

Ms. Mathysen, you have five minutes.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Bishop. I appreciate hearing from you. I can remember learning years ago, to my dismay, that Korean War veterans weren't recognized. I'm glad we've finally come to our senses and we are indeed recognizing them.

I do need your advice on a couple of things. First of all, we talk about these three clauses in the budget implementation act and the need to pass them very quickly. The problem is that they're in this huge budget document—it's something like 400 pages—and it includes some other things.

Are you familiar with that budget? Did you know that it also includes an end to important environmental protections for lakes and rivers, and that it changes unemployment insurance so that a lot of people will not qualify when they're in need?

We're really concerned about the fact that all of this has been lumped together. We are faced with the reality that some parts of the budget, like these three clauses, should certainly pass. We're asking that the clauses that pertain to the clawbacks for veterans be separated out so that we can pass it quickly without engaging in this other political battle. Do you have any advice for us on that?

My second question is on the fact that Korean War veterans were for so long forgotten brings to mind the reality for modern-day veterans. They came back from peacekeeping missions that were horrendous, and from Afghanistan. Some of them experienced some quite terrible things, like your description of human beings trying to climb an icy mountain and suffering as a result of it.

Yet those veterans, those post-Korean War veterans, are excluded from long-term care. They're excluded from a great deal that we think all veterans should have access to. I wondered about your feelings in regard to those modern-day veterans and this dilemma that we have regarding the three clauses that would support veterans, in terms of the clawbacks, as they relate to this mammoth bill I described.

Mr. John Bishop: Thank you very much.

First of all, you have the 400-page document. I've never seen it, so you're far ahead of me in knowing the detail of it and I won't try to bluff my way. I did quite a bit of reading on the Internet, but there's no question that I don't understand it, because I never really got into it. I gather, from what's being said, that it is a great challenge for you to get a grip on it. I'll leave it at that. It's probably not a satisfactory answer but I would not be telling the truth if I tried to make myself appear wise.

With reference to modern-day vets, there's no question in my mind—and as I served in 10 countries, I think I can talk with a certain amount of understanding—that they should be given credit for the injuries that were caused by their service. There's just no question about it. I could go into some of the things that I've seen on some of my postings. I can tell you right now that I think what's missing—and I'm repeating myself in a way—is that, where injury is unquestionably caused by military service, something should be done for them. The families are suffering because of it. Again, I hate to use my own example but you won't even believe it, in my 37 years, with courses, overseas postings, exercises in Gagetown and in the U.S., my children still like me and are very happy. But for 12 of

my 37 years I was not even home. That affects families quite a bit, and that's why you don't find....

For example, in my section in Korea, we had a chap that was 14 years of age. It's in my book. If anybody wants to see my book, I brought a couple of copies for you. The picture is there. Believe it or not, his parents turned him in and said to bring him home. When we finally said goodbye, and we were going to miss him, he was in tears because he'd just turned 15. When he got home, up to 10 years ago, he was so unhappy with his family that he never visited them. He wanted to stay. I realize the law is the law and he shouldn't be serving there at 15. But there's a picture in the Empress Hotel in Victoria of a soldier who won the Victoria Cross, and do you know how old he was when he won it? He was 14 years of age. I won't tell you how he got it.

Thanks very much. That's it.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bishop. We appreciate it.

Mr. Zimmer.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Thank you for coming, John. It's definitely an honour. I feel like I'm talking to Sgt. Rock himself sitting down there. It's an honour to have you here.

I guess why you're here in the first place—and Ms. Mathysen asked you about it—is that our government wants to put action to words and that's why you're here to talk about the budget. We're actually putting money behind what we're talking about. We want to help veterans and that's why we're here today.

You said in your opening statement that Korea has been referred to as the forgotten war. We certainly haven't forgotten about it, and Minister Blaney hasn't forgotten about it either. A lot has been done recently to honour Korean vets. There's a new certificate of recognition that's been created. I think you've spoken to that. In January, Minister Steven Blaney announced 2013 as the Year of the Korean War Veteran, as it marks the 60th anniversary of the Korean War armistice.

I almost know the answer before I ask it, but how has that been received amongst your colleagues and you, to know that you're finally being recognized for your service in Korea?

Mr. John Bishop: There is no question that we're amazed that so much recognition is now given to it. The Koreans have always done that. I hate to admit this, but I've been back about five times because of my different appointments, plus I served there for two or three years as military attaché from 1982-85 approximately. I learned an awful lot during that time.

But we now are slightly embarrassed because so much publicity is being given to it and unfortunately with 60% of us now dead, it doesn't have the same meaning as having everybody alive. I don't think you'll find that there is animosity or dislike—I'm sure I'm saying this correctly—against members of Parliament for what they are trying to do. Your job is not easy either.

I did three tours here and I had some employment up here and I know that things are not easy. But if you can just make faults in it corrected—if you're able to do that—it would be better than saying here are 100 things that are wrong and then you correct 10, knowing the others aren't corrected.

Try to correct some of the things that I mentioned—age—things that were really attributable to the Korean War. You will be admired, there is no question.

● (0930)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I had the opportunity to play in the Imjin Classic, the cup that was on the Rideau that normally is played in Korea for the 60th anniversary. It was quite an honour just to step on the ice and it was interesting that the way it ended was that we tied. We didn't do that on purpose, believe me. We were both trying to win. This was the parliamentarians versus military and we managed to tie, so all our names go on the cup.

It was such an honour to be a part of that, and be a part of what you've done beforehand, in my little way.

Speaking more practically about PTSD, we too as the government are trying to move along and trying to help veterans with PTSD. My cousin has come back from Afghanistan and knows a lot of fellow soldiers who are struggling with this. Do you agree that it's important for us to focus on PTSD? Do you have some thoughts around that?

Mr. John Bishop: Post-traumatic stress syndrome or whatever you call it.... The name has changed quite a few times over the years. I think the best example is the American problem. They're getting more and more every day and they are realizing—and this has caused a problem because of the number they have serving overseas. They realize when they recognize it that they're spending hundreds of millions of dollars. I don't know why their ratio is so high completely, but there's no question it is an actual fact that has happened. There's no question that something should be done to correct that.

Of course it gets back to the other thing. It's a very tough call in some cases because in some cases post-traumatic syndrome may be the way the guy was born. It's a very difficult call, very difficult.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I don't know if I said this initially. I know it's been said all the way from both sides, but just thanks for your service and for all the members in the room who have served our country, we are indeed honoured to have you here today. Thanks for coming.

Mr. John Bishop: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I should point out that Mr. Zimmer is such a gentle, young fellow with the greatest intentions. He mentioned a hockey classic. We should point out that the other night he knocked some teeth out of one of his own colleagues at a hockey game, so he's not quite as gentle as he might appear.

Anyway, thank you very much.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Our last questioner is Ms. Adams, please, for five minutes.

Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

While Mr. Zimmer may not be so gentle, he is excruciatingly respectful of our veterans.

Mr. Bishop, I want to thank you very much for joining us here today.

I know it's been said that the Korean War really is the forgotten war, but as has been correctly pointed out, our government, the Harper government, has taken extraordinary steps to pay tribute to the service and sacrifice that you and your colleagues offered. This year has been named the Year of the Korean War Veteran. We've come out with the certificate. We're asking Legions and all Canadians to identify folks who served during the Korean conflict so we can offer them proper recognition during this important year.

I hate to digress to some technical questions, but we're here to talk about the budget. I would much rather listen to your extraordinary war stories because they really are fascinating. It's critical to continue to share those stories so that future generations have them.

If I might, I'll ask you a few specific questions regarding the WVA amendments. I'd like to talk a little about how a series of small changes can have a very significant impact on many folks. With the changes that are being proposed as part of this budget, we would be providing increased long-term care to over 2,000 additional veterans. We would also, for the first time, provide the war veterans allowance to over 3,000 new veterans, and we would see nearly \$100 million invested in veterans through the war veterans allowance.

Do you think these small changes will have a great and far-reaching impact on veterans?

● (0935)

Mr. John Bishop: There's no question in my mind that a number of firm, not-to-be-changed improvements will make a great difference. You must remember that we didn't get much assistance for a long time, and now getting specific ones.... But you realize that with the ages of our people, after the 60th anniversary of the ceasefire, Korean veterans will be disappearing very quickly. It's amazing the number who are passing away right now every week—just so many of them.

As a great inclusion to the anniversary, if you can pass something with the specific ones you're talking about, then that's all that's required, in my opinion, because of the circumstances of the past and what it is today.

I don't know if that helps or not.

Ms. Eve Adams: It sure does. Thank you, Mr. Bishop.

The war veterans allowance also provides financial assistance to low-income veterans and their immediate survivors. While we want to provide assistance to all veterans, would you agree that our focus should be on those who need the financial assistance most? You spoke to this a little earlier.

Mr. John Bishop: When you say you pay more attention to them, I would agree, but don't turn off the others. There's no question in my mind that some of those who came back, who were badly injured and all the rest of it, didn't have the health or the way to get themselves a great job with a big pension, etc., and they don't have much in the way of finances. I think most Korean veterans would agree those are the people to help.

Someone who was healthy enough—I can think of a few who ended up at the legislature in Victoria, they worked there as guards and so forth—gets a small pension, and with their other, they're fine. Someone who didn't have that has no income. In other words, he might have been unemployed for a long time, he might have been in hospital because something was wrong with him, maybe it was because of his service. They are the ones I worry about.

Ms. Eve Adams: As do we.

If I might add on a personal note, you have a very practical yet very kind way about you.

It's interesting, I've spoken with many Koreans who have now settled in Canada, and they will share stories of how extraordinary they found the fact that Canadians were willing to lay their lives on the line to help them in their hour of need. I just wanted you to have that information. I'm sure you've probably heard that—

Mr. John Bishop: Yes.

Ms. Eve Adams: —but please do take this back to your members and share it, because it really is a proud moment for any Canadian to hear that, and it's only due to your sacrifice.

Recently, the minister—

The Chair: Very briefly, please.

Ms. Eve Adams: I'll be very brief.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs recently joined about 36 Korean vets and took a trip to Korea. I wondered if you could provide any feedback on what your members thought of that experience.

Mr. John Bishop: What they thought of the...?

Ms. Eve Adams: The experience.

Mr. John Bishop: There's no question about it, those who are not in touch with it because of other experiences are overwhelmed by the revisit. There's no question about it at all.

It's very easy to push it to one side, but there's one factor... I wouldn't want to put this in the newspaper, but I have found this during my time in Korea in different roles. I think we provided the third-largest fighting group, and they remember that, but there's one overriding thing. They've always had suspicions about the Americans and the Brits as to what their real purpose was. Is it control of Asia? Is it control of what's on there?

We are looked at differently. We're looked at as people who went over there to help them. We didn't go over there to perhaps increase the effectiveness of our empire.

Ms. Eve Adams: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bishop and committee.

I would just add that everybody has been talking about what goes on, and we have a wonderful little club down in Nova Scotia, in

Yarmouth. It's called the Memorial Club. They are all volunteer students and they go around doing special events. They did memorial stones for those who passed away in Afghanistan. Next week, they're doing a very special event recognizing Korea, which is going to involve several hundred people.

● (0940)

Mr. John Bishop: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for being here.

We're going to suspend for two minutes so everybody can say goodbye to Mr. Bishop. Then we're going to come back in public to discuss the letter.

Two minutes, please, members.

● (0940)

(Pause)

● (0945)

The Chair: We're back in session. We're doing the letter in public session. We then have some business looking forward, for which we'll go in camera.

You all have a copy of the letter from the ANAVETS. They could not appear but they did send along their comments. Everybody has a copy of that. If there's anything from that you want reflected in the letter, I'd appreciate you passing it along to us. It's pretty straightforward.

As you know, I'm obligated to write back to the chair of the finance committee with comments or views that came from our session. We're asked to provide comments. I have drafted some the staff prepared. I'd like to read it out. If it's the will of the committee, we will adopt the letter. Certainly, if there are any comments or points to be made, we can do that before we do the adoption.

Dear Mr. Rajotte,

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I would like to thank you for your letter inviting our committee to consider the subject matter of Bill C-60, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures and more specifically the subject matter of Clauses 156 to 160 (Pension Act and War Veterans Allowance Act) of the Bill.

After careful consideration of your request, our Committee agreed on Thursday May 9, 2013 to undertake a study of the subject matter of the said clauses and has met in this regard on Tuesday May 21 and Thursday May 23, 2013 in order to hear from senior officials at the Department of Veterans Affairs as well as several veterans organisations including: Canadian Veterans Advocacy, Air Force Association, the Royal Canadian Legion, ANAVETS, Aboriginal Veterans Autochtones and the Korean Veterans Association. Their contribution to this study has been very valuable and informative.

After hearing from the witnesses, and considering the provisions contained in clauses 156-160, the Committee wishes to inform you that it has no amendments or recommendations to forward to the Standing Committee on Finance for its consideration.

That is signed by myself as chair of your committee.

That is the draft letter that we have prepared. It's certainly open to comment and the committee's wish as to what they wish to do with the letter.

Mr. O'Toole.

● (0950)

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I move the adoption of your letter as read.

The Chair: Okay, it's been moved and seconded by Mr. Zimmer. It's certainly open to comments.

Mr. Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey: With respect, Mr. Chair, I think it's quite presumptuous to offer a conclusion to Mr. Rajotte before we've had any opportunity to discuss what we've heard, what we feel about the amendments, what we feel about the sections in question. I have submitted amendments. The letter says there are no amendments.

Frankly, I find it borderline offensive that we would draft a letter that purports to speak for the committee before the committee has had any discussion. All we've done so far is question witnesses. Nobody here knows what the committee feels about what they've heard. Nobody here knows what the position of any individual member is with respect to any of the sections before us. To jump over hearing people's views, to summarize their views, to report their views, I think it is very bad form.

The Chair: As always, I appreciate your input, Mr. Casey.

My job is to make sure when this finishes today that we have reported back, or we will not be accepted by the finance committee as of Monday. I think I made that clear. I'm not trying to assume what the committee believes at all. You made assumptions, I gather, by putting in amendments before you heard witnesses today. You probably would be in the same category, then, if you're trying to be abrasive in that form.

What I'm saying is that my job is to prepare a draft letter, which I've done. It's up to the committee as to what it wishes to do with that letter. I've opened it up to the committee. That's my job and that's what I've done to this point.

It is open for discussion or comments. There's been a motion to accept. But, certainly, it's open. For anybody who wishes to comment on where we are, certainly I'd welcome those comments now.

Mr. Zimmer.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Yes, certainly I'd like to proceed the way the letter states, and continue. I think the timeliness of it is necessary. We need to get this through again. We see it on the other end. There are real veterans at the end of this who will receive benefits as a result of this passing, from my perspective.

Mr. Casey said all members haven't. I certainly agree with this. I do. We should move forward and pass this.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. O'Toole.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Casey raises a good point that we haven't had a formal discussion. But at the same time I sit across from Mr. Casey and listen to him intently. I've listened to Ms. Mathysen's interventions. I think I can ascertain their position rather well, as have you, Mr. Chair.

In essence, to state the position of the NDP, it would be general agreement with the provisions. They would want to pull it outside of

the budget implementation act, which I don't think is reasonable. But if it goes to the heart of the amendments themselves, it sounds like there's general consensus on that. Mr. Casey's questions have really been related to litigation and things prior to this act or what may have led to the act, but there seems to be consensus *ad idem* on the provisions themselves. That's essentially what the letter addresses, and it will get these benefits moving faster. So I think we call a vote.

● (0955)

The Chair: We have a couple more hands up.

I don't know who was first. I saw both hands up.

Mr. Casey first, then Ms. Mathysen.

Mr. Sean Casey: Through these amendments the government is doing what it has to do as a result of what the court ordered it to do. I don't think there's any question about that, and I don't think there's any question that complying with a court order is something that should be supported. However, it doesn't address adequately the problem that gave rise to the litigation in the first place. What gave rise to the litigation in the first place is this whole idea of clawbacks. What the amendments do is they lessen the amount of clawbacks, but they don't eliminate them. That's why I've put forward these amendments.

In clause 156 there's a deletion of the words "war veterans allowance". So the war veterans allowance is no longer factored into the clawback scheme, but the only words that are taken out are "war veterans allowance". The words that are left in are "relief or unemployment assistance from the Department."

There's also a reference to subsection 30(2) of the act. Subsection 30(2) references welfare payments paid by provinces. This letter has been drafted without having had the chance to say, "I believe that factoring in welfare payments in clawbacks is unfair". That's probably the first time you've heard this before the letter was written, but they're still there. There are still clawbacks for people who receive assistance from provinces. There are still clawbacks for people who receive unemployment assistance from the department. There are still clawbacks for people who receive relief. For us to pass clause 156 as proposed, it authorizes the continuation of those clawbacks. It's good that it eliminates one, but it's bad that there's a bunch still there.

I believe we need to have a discussion. We need to have the government members say that they're happy the Government of Canada continues to claw back from unemployment relief from the department, and that they're happy the Government of Canada continues to claw back from welfare. That's what we need to hear. Once we hear that and they vote that, then my view on this will be in the minority and that's what the amendment will be. That's clause 156.

Clause 157 allows for a continuation of clawbacks of amounts that are paid through the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. It also allows for a continuation of clawbacks that are justified within the regulations. If the government is happy to take out the reference to war veterans allowance but to allow for clawbacks to continue to VRAB awards, and if the government is happy that they can continue to put things into the regulations that authorize further clawbacks and that necessitate further litigation or that give rise to further litigation, fine, let them say it and then it will pass in that light.

That's the discussion that we need to have, because that's what these amendments do. They go partway. The steps they have taken are positive, but they don't go far enough. If the government feels that they do go far enough, let them say it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

I should be pointing out that our committee will not be offering amendments per se. Committees that are providing information back to the finance committee do not provide amendments. It's the right of any committee member, if they want to pass information directly on to the finance committee, to pass it along. We can make note of the fact that not everybody feels that it's gone far enough or whatever. We can offer that kind of commentary, but the reason we have our legislative counsel here is to point out the committees offering information and advice back do not make amendments to a budget matter. That's done by the finance committee.

We're simply asked to provide our opinions on what's going on, which is fair game. I will also point out that each party has membership on the finance committee and that can be raised there, which is probably a more appropriate setting because the finance committee will be looking at, I assume, suggestions or amendments, and so on.

My point is that we have to send a letter saying we've looked at it, we've dealt with it. Even if there's not 100% agreement I'd rather hear you say—rather than “Are they happy or not?”—that you feel it should go further, that you aren't comfortable with where it is in terms of what's been achieved. That's fair enough. Governments will always have to deal with that reality. But I don't want to get into the sense that one side is good and one side is bad, because I feel the committee has looked at this within the limited timeframe we've had and are trying to say, in as simple a form as possible, that our committee has looked at it and here's our general suggestion.

It's certainly appropriate if you want to provide additional commentary directly through your membership in the finance committee that it be done that way. But this committee will not be looking specifically at amendments, that's not our responsibility. This is all I'm trying to emphasize. We are not in a position where we can start amending or proposing amendments to the budget. That will have to be done at your finance committee.

Ms. Mathysen.

• (1000)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I did want to say that I appreciate your position. I understand that it is necessary for you, as chair, to fulfill your obligations and draft the letter. But I do think that there should be a discussion. I am

cognizant that we cannot make amendments because it's a budget bill, but it does feel rather premature to hear the letter without hearing the discussion. I understand Mr. Casey's concern around that.

The Chair: What time does finance committee have to get it back?

We'd have to meet again before Monday at 9:00 a.m., which I'm willing to do if that's what the committee wants to do, but we do have a time limitation today. I just want to remind the members of that and I think we have a few more names.

Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I guess my challenge is—and we all heard the witnesses—I didn't hear one single witness say that we should not do this, not one single witness. To me, your letter captures my thoughts completely. It's like you pulled it right out of my brain.

The Chair: That's a scary thought.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: It was, really, a well-done letter. The witnesses are supportive of this legislation, that was so obvious.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Adams.

Ms. Eve Adams: Yes, it wasn't simply consensus; it was unanimity. These changes will provide increased long-term care for over 2,000 veterans. They will provide, for the first time, the war veterans allowance to over 3,000 new veterans, and will see nearly \$100 million spent to invest in veterans through the war veterans allowance.

I'm in full concurrence with this letter and I would call the vote, please.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb: My comments were going to be along the lines of your comments, so I don't have anything else to say.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Ben Lobb: You were one step ahead of me.

The Chair: I think Mr. Casey and Mr. O'Toole are next.

Mr. Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey: You indicate that we can't propose amendments here, but I wonder if you could reread the sentences in your letter where you reference amendments.

If we are precluded from putting forth amendments, I don't think that we should say to the committee that we are putting the bill back to them without amendments because amendments, apparently, aren't within our power.

Why would we even suggest that we're not going to amend something we're not allowed to amend?

The Chair: I'm trying to get some professional advice here as we move along.

I get your point that if we took out the reference that there are no amendments and just say we're providing commentary, which is what we're asked to do and not reference the amendments, then you're free, through your colleagues, to talk about amendments. I have no problem taking the sense out that there are no amendments because you are technically correct. That's your brilliant legal training, I'm sure, that's coming to light here.

I understand your point. If the committee's comfortable, we can take out the reference to no amendments and just say we're providing commentary that we've.... Would it be better to pass along the recommendations with that minor adjustment and leave the amendments out?

Then we're not dealing with amendments at all. Is that a reasonable thing to do? Then you're free to make commentary to the finance committee as you see fit. Is that reasonable?

• (1005)

Mr. Sean Casey: Yes.

I think that for us to say we're handing them back without amendments, when we're not allowed to make amendments—

The Chair: That's fair enough.

I was up all night drafting this letter, as you can appreciate.

The legal side who understands what's going on says that's appropriate.

Yes, Mr. O'Toole?

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for staying up all night crafting that. It's appreciated.

Some of us were in the House until midnight last night, so we're all putting the hours in.

The Chair: That's where I did it.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: I think you're spelling out very well the option that Mr. Casey has...we proceed with a vote. Mr. Casey is free to provide his commentary to the finance committee.

I would recommend that he consult with some of his caucus colleagues who were part of the last government—it might give him some insights in that regard—but we move to a vote now.

The Chair: Okay.

On Mr. Casey's suggestion of taking out the word "amendment" so there's no reference to it at all with a cleaned up letter, we've had a

pretty full discussion. I appreciate that this has been rushed and that's what we were stuck with. This wasn't trying to cut anybody off.

Anyway, there's been a call for the vote. All those in favour of adopting the letter, please indicate by show of hands.

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

The Chair: You want that recorded, I assume, Mr. Casey?

Mr. Sean Casey: Yes, please.

The Chair: Show that Mr. Casey was in the negative.

You never get too old to learn, you know? That was Mr. Bishop's point too.

That takes care of the letter and the reason for the witnesses. We will get this back and make sure the finance committee has it by Monday. You will get copies of the letter, translated and cleaned up. As I said, you're free to talk to your colleagues in the finance committee. They'll be discussing the meat of it.

I'm going to suspend again for a minute. We have a couple of items to deal with in camera. I'll ask anybody not attached to the committee to please leave at this time.

Mr. Lizon, you have a comment?

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Before we go in camera, I would like to remind the committee or colleagues that last weekend, May 18 to be exact, marked the 69th anniversary of the battle of Monte Cassino. From January 17 to May 18, the allied troops lost over 55,000 troops including British, Canadian, French, and Polish.

I had the chance to be at the ceremony where there were four veterans in their mid-nineties and who were still able to walk. I was very honoured to be in their presence.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lizon, for pointing that out. It will be in the record that you raised that. I know that if Mr. Stoffer were here, he'd want to say that anytime you can add to the recognition of veterans anywhere, it's a positive thing.

We're going to suspend for a minute. I'll point out that we're going in camera. When we come back, we'll deal with a couple of issues: one budget and one related to our agenda moving forward.

Anybody not part of the committee I would ask to please proceed on. Thank you for coming, it was good to have you here.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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