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# Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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Chair: Marie-France Lalonde





## Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

Monday, April 27, 2026

• (1100)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 32 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

Pursuant to the motion adopted on November 25, 2025, the committee is meeting for its study of the main estimates 2026-27, as well as the subject matter of the supplementary estimates (C) 2025-26.

Before we continue, I would like to ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including our esteemed interpreters, whom I thank.

[English]

First, allow me to welcome the Honourable Jill McKnight, Minister of Veterans Affairs, who is joining us for the first hour. She is joined by the following officials.

From the Department of Veterans Affairs, we have Nancy Gardiner, deputy minister; Mr. Pierre Tessier, assistant deputy minister, chief financial officer and corporate services; Ms. Jane Hicks, acting senior assistant deputy minister, service delivery; and Mr. Mitch Freeman, acting assistant deputy minister, strategic policy, planning and performance branch.

Thank you for taking the time to appear today. We will begin with opening remarks.

Minister McKnight, you have the floor for five minutes.

[Translation]

**Hon. Jill McKnight (Minister of Veterans Affairs):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, esteemed colleagues. Thank you for inviting me to provide updates on some of the work underway at Veterans Affairs Canada.

[English]

I welcome the opportunity to share the progress we are making to strengthen service delivery and reaffirm our commitment to veterans and their families.

At its core, our mandate is simple. When a veteran comes forward, the support they are eligible for must be there without any

uncertainty. The most recent supplementary estimates (C) reflect this commitment, with \$300.4 million in additional funding for the 2025-26 fiscal period.

Looking ahead, Veterans Affairs Canada is forecasting an \$8.2-billion budget for 2026-27, an increase of \$340 million, or 4%. This departmental budget is higher than the opening budget from last year and in alignment with the closing 2025-26 fiscal estimates.

The government remains focused on improving service delivery. Budget 2025 included investments of more than \$184 million over four years to stabilize processing capacity for disability benefit applications and build a new path to addressing existing wait times. This investment, combined with the ongoing modernization of VAC's operational processes and IT infrastructure, will ensure that veterans can continue to receive timely, responsive and accessible support. Budget 2025 commits an additional \$40.1 million annually to sustain this progress.

Even as we align certain benefits and programs to reflect market realities such as the adjustment in the rate of reimbursement for the cannabis for medical purposes benefit, we are maintaining full access to the supports veterans are eligible for. This delivers on the government's commitment to Canadians to invest more, reduce red tape and protect access to services and benefits.

It's important to be clear. Veterans Affairs Canada is not facing cuts. In fact, it's quite the opposite. We will ensure that funds are always available for veterans to receive the benefits and supports for which they are eligible.

• (1105)

[Translation]

We will ensure funds are always available for veterans to receive the benefits and supports for which they are eligible.

[English]

The government's responsibility also extends to remembrance. Next week, we will break ground to start construction of the national monument to Canada's mission in Afghanistan. Upon completion, this solemn space will offer veterans, Canadian Armed Forces members and Canadians a place to reflect on the service and sacrifice of all those who served in the mission, those who supported them from home and the 158 Canadian soldiers and seven civilians who gave their lives.

[Translation]

It is a place of remembrance, a place of respect, a place to remember the 165 lives we will never forget.

[English]

In light of this responsibility for remembrance and recognition, along with the Minister of National Defence, I commend the advocacy of colleagues in both the House and the Senate in championing issues of foundational importance to the Canadian Armed Forces—past, present and yet to come.

Our government welcomes the opportunity to work with parliamentarians on the recognition of service, be it the individual or the mission. We look forward to working collaboratively to maintain this ongoing conversation as the mission or missions evolve.

With regard to e-petition 6661, the government looks forward to tabling a clear, unambiguous response presently. Likewise, regarding Bill S-246, the importance of getting this review and assessment process right the first time can't be overstated. Current and future veterans need the assurance that the process put in place will speak to concerns for today and tomorrow.

For all Canadians, we must ensure that commemoration, commendation and ultimately recognition of Canada's women and men in uniform remain robust and mature.

In closing, Madam Chair, I reaffirm the Government of Canada's commitment to supporting veterans and their families. More than 90% of the total estimates are delivered as direct payments to veterans, their families and other program recipients.

These investments in Veterans Affairs Canada represent one of the most significant contributions to our government's mission objectives, including being the second-largest contributor to meeting the government's NATO spending target. This is not incidental. It is intentional.

• (1110)

[Translation]

Our commitment is clear: We will always be there, for today and for tomorrow.

[English]

To the veteran community, your service matters, your sacrifice is recognized and your future remains our responsibility.

[Translation]

Thank you very much. I am now ready to answer your questions.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister McKnight. It's always a pleasure to have you here.

We will open our first round of questions with six minutes.

Mr. Richards, you have six minutes.

**Blake Richards (Airdrie—Cochrane, CPC):** Minister, just as you did when you were before the finance committee back in February, this morning you indicated that Veterans Affairs isn't facing cuts, yet everybody else in the entire country seems to understand and be well aware that there are cuts happening to veterans' services—massive ones, in fact.

There is a cloud of uncertainty around them. You said in your opening remarks that you want to make sure those services are there, "without any uncertainty". Well, there is a lot of uncertainty right now. What they're hearing from you and what veterans are seeing in reality are very different. Let's dig into that.

You were at the finance committee back in February. About a week later—it was less than a week later, in fact—the president of the Union of Veterans' Affairs Employees came forward and raised the alarm about the cuts that were happening at the bureau of pensions advocates.

For those who aren't familiar with the bureau of pensions advocates, they are the folks who actually help when Veterans Affairs denies someone. They help them get the benefits they need, and 90% of the time, as a result of what's happening through the bureau of pensions advocates at the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, there's an improvement in the services that veterans receive.

As I sit here, I'm not even sure what to ask you. You seem to not be in reality here. Everyone understands that there are cuts to veterans, including what I just indicated with the bureau of pensions advocates. Can you square that circle for me somehow? I don't know how you can sit here and tell us there aren't cuts, when everybody else is well aware that there are cuts. Explain that to us.

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** Madam Chair, through you, I would like to correct the record. My colleague is stating something that is inaccurate. There is not a cut to services and benefits for veterans. My colleague has—

**Blake Richards:** You would take the position that the bureau of pensions advocates is not a service to veterans.

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** My colleague has stated something that I disagree with. The bureau of pensions advocates is—

**Blake Richards:** What exactly do you disagree with? Do you disagree that there's a cut, or do you disagree that it's a service to veterans?

**The Chair:** I would like the member to allow the minister to answer, please.

**Blake Richards:** I just needed to clarify what she was saying.

**The Chair:** Yes, I know. That's fine, but let's allow the minister to speak.

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I agree that the bureau of pensions advocates is a service to veterans. We are not cutting the service. The bureau offers free legal advice and representation to a veteran pursuing the appeals process. There was temporary funding as part of budget 2023, which was sunset on March 31, 2026. At this point, we are now transitioning back to steady-state operations, which was prior to the temporary funding of 2023.

**Blake Richards:** That sounds to me like Liberal-speak. I mean, cutting funding, not renewing funding, neglecting programs, maybe sunset—these all mean the same thing. They all have the same result on veterans. Veterans are losing those services. The Association of Justice Counsel, which represents the BPA, has said that this is not just a cut; it's a devastating one—a devastating one. They say that this means veterans could wait up to five years—five years—to get the result they need.

How can you sit there and tell us that this isn't going to impact services to veterans? They're going to wait five years to even get a decision. Tell us how that doesn't impact them. It's a major impact. It's a devastating cut. No matter how you want to explain it, that's what it is. Tell us how it's not going to impact veterans when they have to wait five years.

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** We are returning to our steady-state operations to continue offering to veterans the service of support with their appeals process. We are also, at the same time, as mentioned, with the budget investment of the \$184.9 million, modernizing our service delivery and reviewing processes so that we can make investments in technology and tools to equip frontline staff to make decisions for veterans.

All of this will enhance the service delivery we offer across Veterans Affairs Canada, including through the Bureau of Pensions Advocates.

• (1115)

**Blake Richards:** I can only imagine what veterans must be feeling watching this. I find this incredibly frustrating. Everybody else knows this is a cut, and you're sitting there trying to tell us it's not. It is just shocking.

I guess there's not much point continuing down that line. You're just going to continue to read your talking points, and veterans are going to continue to be frustrated.

Let me ask this instead. You mentioned in your opening remarks, almost in code, the military honours review board. There have been calls, unanimously from this committee, and also from the Senate and from various provinces in this country, for this military honours review board. You mentioned that there was going to be a comprehensive response to the petition. You didn't indicate whether that would be a positive response or not.

Does the government plan to create a military honours review board so that heroes like Jess Larochelle and others can finally have the chance to receive the Victoria Cross, which they deserve?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** Honouring the bravery and service and sacrifice of our Canadian Armed Forces is sacred and a deeply held commitment that we will be continuing to move forward with. Military honours are fully considered by the Canadian Armed Forces' chain of command. It involves a comprehensive and rigorous review.

**Blake Richards:** So there's no response there either.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Richards. I appreciate it. Thank you.

Next, we have Monsieur St-Pierre.

You have six minutes.

**Eric St-Pierre (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.):** Thank you.

Minister, thanks for being here today.

Is there anything from the questions you just received from my colleague that you'd like to clarify while you have a few minutes here?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** Thank you very much.

I think I was very clear, with regard to the bureau of pensions advocates, that this was funding that was coming to a sunset and that we are returning to our steady-state operations so that we can continue to make investments in service delivery, which will include through the services delivered through the bureau of pensions advocates. We will continue to offer this free service to veterans to support them in their reviews, if they undertake them.

Thank you.

**Eric St-Pierre:** Can you quickly comment on whether the Veterans Affairs Canada's budget is fully included in the calculation of the 2% of GDP that was set out by NATO?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** Certainly. Over 90% of VAC's total budget does count towards the NATO 2% GDP calculation. As I mentioned in my remarks, that funding is delivered directly to veterans as services and benefits to their families, and that does contribute to that 2% calculation.

**Eric St-Pierre:** Minister, the comprehensive expenditure review was, I'm sure, an intensive process, and while I don't want to ask you to break confidences, I think veterans affairs committee members would appreciate knowing the mindset that you took when making decisions on how to advance that review. Can you clarify how many Veterans Affairs Canada programs are being cut?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** The comprehensive expenditure review was a very large project to be undertaking. It took a lot of time and intentionality to ensure that we could maintain all services and benefits for veterans. That is core to the foundation of our mission and the work we do, and it is front and centre in the decisions we are making. That was the centre point of undertaking that process.

As part of that process, while maintaining the benefits and the accessibility of the cannabis for medical purposes benefit, we reduced the rate of reimbursement to better align with the market rate, while still allowing veterans to maintain access to the program and to their daily per-gram limit, so that they would not have a change or a cut. There were no cuts made to the benefits and programs for veterans.

**Eric St-Pierre:** Maybe on that line of thinking, were any Veterans Affairs Canada benefits cut?

• (1120)

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** There have been no cuts to the benefits offered to veterans through Veterans Affairs Canada.

**Eric St-Pierre:** With regard to the caregiver recognition benefit, I think it accounted for a 6.5% decrease in funding. Can you comment on that decrease?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** As we know, not all veterans have the same experience. Each of them is unique. Each of their needs is unique. As such, the ebbs and flows within our programs and services will adjust based on the needs of the veterans at a given moment. Specific to that program, I have officials with me, and they may be able to add more specifics to the caregiver program if you wish.

**Eric St-Pierre:** Thank you.

I think, during your testimony, you mentioned the national monument to Canada's mission in Afghanistan, which is a wonderful project. Can you comment quickly on the construction schedule and when you plan on undertaking the construction of this new monument? Also, can you comment on the estimated costs for this project?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** This monument has been many years coming forward, and it is a significant step that we are reaching the sod-turning in the coming weeks. I think this is an important step that we are moving forward with, and construction will be commencing as we undertake that, with completion expected sometime in 2028. I know invitations were extended to the ACVA committee members to be at the sod-turning, and I hope everyone will have a chance to join us.

**Eric St-Pierre:** Thank you. We look forward to joining you in the coming weeks.

I have a question on the Last Post Fund, which basically ensures that low-income families can provide proper burial for deceased veterans. The funding fell from around \$12 million in 2018-19 to about \$6.7 million in 2026-27.

In 30 seconds, can you quickly comment on this decrease?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** Again, as I mentioned, veterans and their needs will be, at any given point in the cycle of their relationship with Veterans Affairs, at their own individual stage. For specifics like that, I would turn to the officials, who may be able to add more detail.

**Eric St-Pierre:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Maybe we can pause that for the second round.

Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you for being here, Minister. It's a privilege to be able to ask you questions. They will mainly focus on what veterans tell us when they visit us or contact us. Therefore, you won't be surprised that we're talking about Quebec veterans.

I looked at the latest figures from the Quebec Veterans Foundation. Obviously, a large proportion of veterans come from Quebec, and the majority of them are francophone. In 2024-25, as part of the fund for veterans and their families, \$14.3 million was distributed across the country. However, while Quebec accounts for nearly 23% of the veteran population, Quebec organizations received only 2% of the total funding. I would very much like to understand why this disparity exists.

[*English*]

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** I would like to ask for a clarification, because it may be a translation issue.

You were mentioning the fund that distributed \$14.3 million. Was that the veteran and family well-being fund?

Okay. Thank you. I just wanted to be sure.

The veteran and family well-being fund is, as you mentioned, a fund that has funds available to support projects that support and focus on veteran well-being and care. We fund activities that include research, programs and other things that bring veterans together. There is a robust and rigorous process for receiving and reviewing applications to ensure they meet the eligibility criteria of the program.

As it specifically relates to Quebec organizations, I would turn to my department officials to specify how that is divided between Quebec and the rest of Canada. They could provide insight on that.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Actually, I'd like to know what the criteria are, because the organizations that haven't received funding will want a second chance. It's truly unacceptable that Quebec organizations received only 2% of the total funding. Not a day goes by that I don't hear about it. Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Furthermore, Minister, let's not forget that Ontario, which accounts for about 30% of the Canadian population, received 60% of the funding. Even Manitoba received a bigger share of the funding than Quebec. So something needs to be clarified, and I'd like to see it resolved quickly.

Now, in your opinion, is \$3.33 per veteran in Quebec adequate funding?

[English]

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** I'm not sure what the \$3.30 per veteran refers to.

[Translation]

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** That's what the funds allocated to Quebec represent in proportion to the number of veterans. I just wanted to bring this to your attention. I did the math and wondered how we could possibly provide adequate, ongoing services to our veterans with only \$3.33.

What would be the concrete steps—

**The Chair:** Ms. Gaudreau, wait a moment. I've stopped the clock.

If I understand correctly, you did your own analysis to arrive at the \$3.33 figure. I wonder if the department could send us, over the next few weeks, more detailed information on the amount each Canadian veteran receives, including veterans from Quebec. I'm just a little surprised, Ms. Gaudreau. I don't mean to dismiss your math, I just want to make sure we're using the right figures on the committee.

Minister, if you and your team could provide us, over the next few weeks, with the average amount allocated to each Canadian veteran based on the services they receive, we would appreciate it. I assume that this amount varies from veteran to veteran, depending on the services they receive, the complexity of their case and where they live, but it could help us clarify the figure mentioned today.

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Absolutely, Madam Chair. It's a matter of taking into account the clientele in each province and consequently, the francophone clientele. With these figures, we'll be able to make the necessary adjustments.

Now, if adjustments are actually needed, what do you intend to do in the future to address this discrepancy?

[English]

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** I don't have those numbers with me, so I will look to the department to speak to that.

In the past, we've had conversations about the availability of services to francophone veterans and about ensuring that they have access to services in the language of their choosing. We are a bilingual country. Whether they are francophone veterans in Quebec or across Canada, we want to ensure they have access to that service.

We know that, as recently as September, the average turnaround time for a francophone veteran was slightly better or at least on par with that for an anglophone veteran. I think the difference is 0.9 weeks, where the francophone turnaround time was slightly less. We also know that 30% of Veterans Affairs employees who are making disability decisions are either French or bilingual, to meet the needs of our veterans who choose to have communication in French.

Is there the opportunity to continue enhancing these services? There is always the opportunity to grow and improve.

• (1130)

[Translation]

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** [Inaudible—Editor] adjust, but that's okay.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** You can come back to this in the next round. Thank you very much.

We'll now move on to the second round of questions.

[English]

We have Mrs. Wagantall for five minutes.

**Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, you are also the Associate Minister of National Defence, and I'm sure you're aware of what's been happening with Bill C-11.

The Arbour report was in the recommendations word for word, and it is four years old. She would not come to committee. Others did testify, along with our veterans.

I would really appreciate you coming on record today to indicate whether you support erasing the work of the national defence committee and the testimony of the women veterans who contributed to it.

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** I would like to clarify something. You mentioned about not appearing before the committee.

Was that in reference to me or to somebody else?

**Cathay Wagantall:** No, it was Justice Arbour.

Please go ahead, quickly.

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** Thank you for clarifying that.

I stand with continuing to support women veterans in their experiences, ensuring that they are heard and their unique experiences are represented, and continuing to work with the government to address those needs.

**Cathay Wagantall:** That answers the question. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

The department plan of 2026-27 states that VAC “will keep tracking progress on recommendations from the Invisible No More report by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs” and the Women Veterans Council “will continue to share insights and recommendations to help [VAC] address the unique needs of women Veterans.”

Six of the 12 members have announced they're stepping down. Five of eight of those are veterans. Three of the six remaining members—who are wonderful—are Royal Canadian Mounted Police representation.

With this mass resignation of women from the veterans council and your government now scrapping all of the amendments made to Bill C-11, which were done with input from those same veterans, what do you have to say to those women who've been reaching out over the actions of your government?

How do you actually plan to rely on the work of the Women Veterans Council in the future?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** I thank all members of the Women Veterans Council for their commitment and their contributions to a voluntary advisory council. The insights that they offered and the impact they made during the first year were significant. We are—

**Cathay Wagantall:** Can I just interrupt you, Minister? I'm sorry.

I hear from many of them. They have absolutely felt ignored through the course of this year.

I now need to share my time with my colleague, Mr. Tolmie.

**Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC):** Thank you, Minister, for joining us today.

You've been in this role for just under a year. In your opening testimony today, you said that your decisions are not incidental but intentional.

I'd like to ask you about your intentional decisions when it comes to the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires—an 80-year-old contract that employs thousands of veterans. You've decided to cancel that, but you're going to be renewing the PCVRS contract.

As my colleague from across the aisle said, could you give me your mindset on how you came to those decisions?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** As with all government policies, we know it will evolve as goals change. Our focus is on ensuring that veterans are supported in the employment that best meets their needs and skills and where they are in their experiences today.

**Fraser Tolmie:** Thank you.

Are you saying to me that those who are employed with the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires are unhappy with their employment?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** No, I'm not saying that. I am saying that we are looking to expand opportunities to meet the needs of veterans.

**Fraser Tolmie:** Explain to me how PCVRS is going to do that. I believe the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires is an awesome organization. They've done some yeoman's work here. I just find this decision very unsatisfactory.

I'd like to know how you came to that decision.

• (1135)

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** Madam Chair, I don't agree with the member's assessment—comparing the PCVRS rehabilitation contract and the policy of first right of refusal with the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires.

**Fraser Tolmie:** Is my time done?

**The Chair:** Yes. Thank you very much. I apologize, Mr. Tolmie.

Thank you, Minister.

For five minutes, we'll go to Mr. d'Entremont.

[*Translation*]

**Chris d'Entremont (Acadie—Annapolis, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Minister, thanks for being here today to answer our questions.

As we try to decipher budgets, which tend to be complicated, things can be taken out of context a lot of times. Sometimes there's a bit of, I would say, feigned controversy coming from our friends across the way.

I want to go back to the bureau of pensions advocates for a minute.

Can you clarify what it is, what it isn't, and how investing on the front lines is a better way to look at this? We want to be able to help veterans on the front lines so they don't have to go to the bureau of pensions advocates. That is what I'm understanding here.

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** As I've already mentioned, we are making an adjustment back to steady-state operations following the conclusion of the temporary funding. We have the investment of \$184.9 million over four years. That is to invest in service modernization and service delivery.

The opportunity here is working with veterans at the front end of their journey with Veterans Affairs Canada, in order to support them, engage with them and ensure that the process for reviewing disability applications... We made investments there so that, hopefully, veterans don't have to go through the appeals process. We are not looking to reduce the appeals. We're not looking to change that. This is about supporting veterans at the beginning—supporting them in their process with Veterans Affairs Canada.

The bureau will continue to be available to support veterans, but our hope is that, by engaging with them earlier and putting resources at the beginning, we can support them before they need to get to that point.

**Chris d'Entremont:** On the other side, a lot of times, when people come to our offices, they're normally at their wits' end. They've had some kind of negative review or have run into a problem—that kind of stuff. We end up hearing, probably, the worst of the worst as it goes along.

What kinds of positives do we have in the process? How are things going for real?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** Thank you for mentioning that. I have the opportunity to engage with veterans across the country, as many of our colleagues do. While things aren't perfect—that's the truth—what I'm hearing is.... Even as recently as Saturday night, I was engaged with a veteran in my community who said, "My process has gone smoother than it previously did." They are finding that the engagement is improving.

We honestly discussed how, yes, it could continue to be enhanced. That is the work we are continuing to do with our investments. Overall, the majority of conversations are about things being okay. They're better than they were. We will continue to make those investments to support veterans in their journey with Veterans Affairs Canada.

**Chris d'Entremont:** In your opening remarks, you talked about the extra monies that are going into the department. I think it was \$41 million there. Can you maybe talk about whether that means hiring, or does that mean opening new offices? Where would that investment go?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** Of the \$184.9 million, there is \$24 million that has been identified for IT infrastructure to support the processes. For the specifics as to what else that means, I would refer to the department officials to break that down further.

• (1140)

**Chris d'Entremont:** I'll change the subject, because I know that I have only about 30 seconds left. When we talk to veterans, we have veterans of the Second World War and the Korean War, and we have more modern vets. Do we treat them all the same, or do we look at them considering how they have served our country?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** Each veteran's experience is going to be unique. We can't treat all veterans the same, because each of them has their own experience. That would be whether we were comparing two veterans who served in the same conflict or whether we're comparing veterans. Each individual veteran needs to be looked at for their own unique experiences and for their needs in terms of where they are today.

**The Chair:** That's excellent. Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Madam Chair, I would like to go back to the figure I mentioned earlier. The Quebec Veterans Foundation relied on a document that refers to three partners aligned behind a shared vision to highlight the \$3.33 figure, among other things. I'd also like to thank the executive director, Jonathan Audet. That information exists and I can send it to you. So, honestly, when you spoke earlier, I was completely taken aback and lost my train of thought.

I'm a bit flabbergasted to see that you're trying to promote what's going well. This is unacceptable. Right now, we're talking about veterans who have served their country and who were told we'd be there for them until the end. We're trying to talk about resilience. We're talking about lives. We just finished a study on the high suicide rate among veterans. A staggering number of disappointed and frustrated people who no longer trust the system are coming to see me. People are telling us there's absolutely no chance they'd en-

courage their children to do what they did. These people travel and see what's happening elsewhere.

Minister, you've been in office for a year and, during question period, if I understood correctly, you mentioned that there would be an independent investigation of the vocational rehabilitation and support services program, or VRSSP, to address its shortcomings, because it's currently under review.

Will you commit to doing that investigation now?

[English]

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** My understanding of the question is whether we will undertake a review of the PCVRS program.

During my previous appearance, I made that commitment of an independent review that will be undertaken of the PCVRS. Work has been progressing on that, and we anticipate having more to share in the coming months.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Gaudreau.

[English]

Mr. Viersen, you have five minutes.

**Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the Minister for being here today.

I want to thank Madame Gaudreau for teeing this off for me a little bit.

You're a new minister to this role, but we've experienced as opposition members for a number of years how Liberals have fed their friends. We've seen the We Charity scandal. We've seen the green slush fund scandal. We've seen this launch pad corruption scandal over the last number of weeks.

This PCVRS feels similar. It feels like a pump-and-dump scheme. It feels like the government, your department, was managing case files and doing this kind of thing, and probably has the capability to manage all of these case files, yet kind of attached on the side is an appendage, so we got this PCVRS along the way. How does it make you feel that veterans have been used and veterans services have been used to drive up the stock prices of particular companies?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** Madam Chair, I disagree with my colleague's assessments. I think there are many pieces there that I don't agree with. The PCVRS program was brought in for a holistic approach to support veterans in their rehabilitation journey.

• (1145)

**Arnold Viersen:** Would you say that your ministry is not capable of doing that?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** It is important that we look at as many opportunities as possible to meet the needs of veterans in ways that—

**Arnold Viersen:** Would you deny it and say that stock prices haven't gone up because of this contract?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** That is outside the scope of my expertise or my focus. I disagree with this line of questioning.

**The Chair:** Mr. Viersen, I'm just going to ask you to please allow the minister to respond to your question.

**Arnold Viersen:** I think we've been getting adequate responses here, Madam Chair.

Who will be doing the independent review on PCVRS?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** As I mentioned in my answer to our colleague, the work is being undertaken right now to set the scope and the process for the review. We will be going through appropriate channels to have that review undertaken.

**Arnold Viersen:** What kind of an organization are you looking for, for an independent review?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** It will be an independent...of our department that is conducting the review.

**Arnold Viersen:** Will it be your department that conducts the review?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** No, it is going to be independent of the department that is conducting the review.

**Arnold Viersen:** Okay.

What are some of the criteria that you're looking for in this review? What are some assessment metrics that you will be looking for?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** As I said, we are in the midst of working through the scoping activity right now to define the parameters of the review. I look forward to sharing more details as we move through.

**Arnold Viersen:** For sure, but you're the minister. You have an understanding of these things. What would you like to see as some of the things that would be captured in the scope of this review?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** Both in the study that was undertaken and in the conversations that I have had with veterans, there are a number of experiences that will be considered, including the veterans' experience, the experience of Veterans Affairs Canada working with the service provider, and the experience of the service providers and the affiliates within the service providers. There are a number of different avenues that we will be looking at.

**Arnold Viersen:** Will that review be the basis on which you make your decision on whether to renew the contract?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** At this point, I am focused on defining the scope of the review, so that we can move forward with those steps before we look at the next decision. Right now, it is about how we get the independent review done and ensuring that veterans who are currently on the rehabilitation journey have access to continuous care.

**Arnold Viersen:** Will you be asking for a recommendation to renew that contract, from this review?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** At this moment, it is too early to determine that.

**Arnold Viersen:** If you don't like the findings of the review, you'll ignore it and make your own decision. Is that what you're saying?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** Madam Chair, my colleague is choosing to make assumptions and to put words in my mouth. I am undertaking the steps to define the parameters of the review first.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Viersen.

I guess we all have clips and fundraising activity happening here today.

**Blake Richards:** I guess I'll formally raise a point of order, Chair. I'll just say this. I don't believe it's the role of the chair to engage in partisan types of comments. I don't believe anyone here was doing that. I believe that the chair was guilty of that, and I hope she will choose to apologize to the member for that.

**The Chair:** I would just like to make sure that all members of Parliament, as they ask questions, allow the minister and our wonderful guests who have come to this committee to answer properly. That's what I will say.

For five minutes, we have Mr. Casey.

**Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Welcome, Minister, and your team.

If there's any element of the questioning during the last five minutes where you felt that you were cut off and wanted to be able to explain your answer, this would be a good time to do it.

• (1150)

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** I would just reinforce that my first and foremost priority is ensuring that our veterans continue to have access to continuous care to support them in their journey. That is fundamental to what we are doing, and that needs to be our number one focus.

We are moving forward with the independent review, so that we can look at the program, and the provision of the program, to ensure that it is meeting the needs of veterans.

**Sean Casey:** Mr. Tolmie asked you a series of questions around the right of first refusal, attempting to draw a link with the PCVRS contract.

For starters, is the right of first refusal a policy, or is it a program?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** It is a policy of the government that was established in 1945.

**Sean Casey:** Feel free to elaborate a little on the policy change, the justification for the change and when it's to come into effect.

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** The policy, as I said, was enacted to support the needs of soldiers who were returning home from the war in 1945 and connect them with employment in guard services.

As we've mentioned, today our veterans cover a wide range of skills. They are highly trained individuals, highly educated individuals, and each of them is in a unique and different experience, based on their service and what that has looked like.

We are looking to expand our opportunities for employment for veterans, to meet them where they are in their needs, in their availability and in a career of their choosing, one that meets what they would like to do. This can include guard services. It may also include a number of other opportunities.

We will be working to support veterans through the veterans employment strategy that has been developed, as we move forward and implement it, and we'll continue to work with the Corps of Commissionaires to offer opportunities in guard services for veterans as well.

The time frame for the change is that the policy would be coming to an end in March 2027.

**Sean Casey:** Just to be clear, when the policy comes to an end in March 2027, security services at federal government properties will be open to the market. Is there any reason that they wouldn't be able to bid for those contracts?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** It will be an open and competitive process, yes. The Corps of Commissionaires could choose to submit a bid for one of those contracts, and I would expect or anticipate that the Corps of Commissionaires would have the expertise and the knowledge to be able to submit a competitive bid.

**Sean Casey:** I want to come back to a comment that was made, I think in the preamble to a question from Mr. Richards, with respect to the bureau of pensions advocates and the Association of Justice Counsel. The comment talked about the likelihood of a five-year delay in the processing of appeals through the Veterans Review and Appeal Board.

I expect your officials may be interested in this question, but I'll ask you first. Feel free to move it over if you like.

Have there been discussions with the association, and does the department share the view of the association that delays of up to five years are likely?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** I feel the officials would be the best ones to respond to that question, so I will let them respond.

**Mitch Freeman (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance Branch, Department of Veterans Affairs):** I would highlight a couple of things in this regard.

First, I'm not a big fan of the hypothetical aspect of a five-year explanation in that regard. In fact, the Department of Veterans Affairs takes the situation very seriously, end to end, from a veterans' benefits point of view, including from the time of application through decision....

• (1155)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. You're out of time. Mr. Casey is out of time.

I apologize. I should have acknowledged the signals. When I do this, it's because you're actually out of time, Mr. Freeman. On that note, I will have to interrupt you, and I apologize sincerely.

We do have five minutes left for the minister's appearance, so I think we'll do two, two and one to be fair, so two minutes, two minutes and Madame Gaudreau for one minute.

I'm not sure who's starting.

I'm sorry, Ms. Wagantall.

**Cathay Wagantall:** Thank you so much, Chair.

Minister, during the silent no more testimony, I don't know if you've read it or not or listened to it, but a young woman new to the armed forces was gang-raped, and when she attempted to get help was basically put in jail for over a week on the base, with no communications whatsoever, then escorted to another city to a hospital to get assistance.

Then, in the end, she had to fight very hard to get any care. As a matter of fact, it was the pension advocates who located her files in a place totally not related to where all files should be protected and available.

If those pension advocates are losing funding and we are now going entirely only to a civilian court to have these individuals who faced military sexual trauma get assistance and have their cases heard, will the pension advocates have the funding and the support of Veterans Affairs to assist those veterans? They are there as a tool for the veterans, and their support is being clawed back. Are they available? Just give a yes or no, please.

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** First, I think it's incredibly important to acknowledge the courage of the individuals who chose to come forward and share their stories.

**Cathay Wagantall:** Thank you, I appreciate that, but I have limited time. Please, will the pension advocates be available for those individuals taking their cases to court? Just give a yes or no.

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** As I've mentioned, the bureau of pensions advocates will continue to be available as a free resource for veterans.

**Cathay Wagantall:** Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I understand that as a yes. Thank you. I hope to see that.

Can you also just quickly mention something on this? In response to all the feedback that we got at this committee on spouses and families getting mental health care in their own right, is there funding being set aside for that with this budget, yes or no?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** I look forward to receiving the report on suicide from this committee and to reviewing the recommendations that come forward.

**Cathay Wagantall:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I believe that for two minutes we have Mrs. Hirtle.

**Alana Hirtle (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, good morning.

As you know, we've been doing an entrepreneurship study for veteran entrepreneurs. In the time that we have, can you clarify for veterans and our colleagues what the national veterans employment strategy represents and how you're driving to modernize and operationalize this strategy?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** I've had the opportunity to speak about the veteran employment strategy, but also the entrepreneurship opportunity for veterans a few times. It is something that I think is tremendously important as we support veterans in connecting with the career of their choosing that meets their needs where they are right now. Of that, veteran entrepreneurship is an opportunity on which I think we can continue to work with veterans to explore and to meet their needs.

I've had the opportunity to speak with a few veteran entrepreneurs now who have shared the positive impacts that entrepreneurship has had for them in terms of being able to adapt to their needs and give them the flexibility. In some cases, it has allowed them to continue to serve in a reserve capacity while growing their business, which has been a tremendous example.

I know that this is something this committee has been studying as well and that a report will be forthcoming with recommendations, and I look forward to reading that as we move forward and build out the strategy to meet and work with veterans.

**Alana Hirtle:** Thank you.

Very quickly, is this relevant to the work that you're going to be doing over the next 12 months?

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** Yes, it is incredibly relevant to the work that is being undertaken right now. I look forward to sharing more updates.

• (1200)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

For the last minute, I'll turn it over to Ms. Gaudreau.

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Many veterans are wondering about the Prime Minister's level of interest and commitment toward them.

My question is simple: What is the situation?

[*English*]

**Hon. Jill McKnight:** We continue to look at and to make investments in protecting Canada and investing in our security and our sovereignty. The veterans are a key component of that, as the individuals who have served this country, who have stood up for Canada and who have defended our sovereignty. We will continue to move forward with recognition of the modern-day veteran and the contributions they have made to Canada.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** That concludes our first hour with Minister McKnight.

[*English*]

As always, Minister McKnight, thank you very much for joining us.

I will suspend, and then we'll go into the second hour. Thank you.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

In the second hour of the meeting, we have the following witnesses from the Department of Veterans Affairs: Pierre Tessier, assistant deputy minister, chief financial officer and corporate services; Jane Hicks, acting senior assistant deputy minister, service delivery; and Mitch Freeman, acting assistant deputy minister, strategic policy, planning and performance.

We will resume the rounds of questions from committee members.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Richards.

[*English*]

for six minutes to start the conversation.

**Blake Richards:** Chair, we continue to struggle here, because veterans across this country, and almost everybody else, seem to be well aware that there are a number of different areas where there are cuts being faced, yet we had the minister continue to sit here and tell us that there aren't cuts. There's clearly a need for this committee to do a study on the budget cuts.

I move the following, and it's been on notice since February 19:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs undertake a study of 10 meetings to study the effects of the federal budget cuts proposed in budget 2025 as it relates to veterans services; that as part of this study the committee examine the proposed changes in legislative definitions related to long term care, the proposed cuts to medical cannabis reimbursement, the recent layoffs from the bureau of pensions advocates, RCMP pension changes and any other related topics; and that for this study the witnesses include, but are not limited to:

- a) The Minister of Veterans Affairs
- b) The Parliamentary Budget Officer
- c) The veterans ombud
- d) The Royal Canadian Legion and other veteran organizations

- e) Veterans
- f) Veterans service providers

That the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request a government response to the report.

I'm moving this, obviously, in response to what we've heard here from the minister, but also because there is a need for this study to happen. If, in fact, what the minister is telling us is true, I see no reason that the government would have any trouble supporting such a motion, so that it can be cleared up. There's certainly a lot of doubt out there—if we even want to put it nicely—about what is happening.

I won't get into a whole lot of details about the motion, because I'd like to see it pass, and we can then use the time to question the officials.

For anyone who's watching today, as I've already said, should this be something...the government has nothing to hide, they should have no trouble supporting this motion. If they do have something to hide, well, you may see attempts to adjourn debate. You may see a filibuster. Who knows?

It's very clear to everyone in Canada that they're soon to have a majority at committees, based on what they're doing right now, and they may want to avoid facing scrutiny on these cuts. However, should they have nothing to hide, I would think they would have no trouble supporting this.

I move that motion. I hope we can get support for it and that we can have a study. We're talking about 10 meetings, which I know is lengthy, but it's also talking about five different areas of cuts—that's a couple of meetings per cut. I don't think that's too much to ask. I move the motion, and I hope we can pass it.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I'll suspend—

**Sean Casey:** On a point of order, Madam Chair, is this motion exactly the one that was put on notice back in February?

**A voice:** It is, yes.

**Sean Casey:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** That's perfect. Thank you very much.

I will suspend so we can look at the motion.

● (1205) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

● (1210)

**The Chair:** We're back.

I would like to give Mr. Casey the chance to respond.

[*Translation*]

**Sean Casey:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

This motion was given notice on February 19, 2026. It's somewhat surprising that it's being introduced two months later. The 2025 budget has been passed, as has the budget implementation bill, and now, just as we're in the process of changing the composi-

tion of the committees, this stunt is being attempted. Let's be clear: It's a stunt.

I've had a few conversations with the Bloc Québécois representative, who indicated that 10 meetings were probably too many. So I imagine an amendment to this motion will be proposed, but we'll see. I'll let Ms. Gaudreau speak for herself.

● (1215)

[*English*]

Here we are debating a motion that was put on notice on February 19, 2026, after budget 2025 has been adopted by the House, after the Budget Implementation Act was adopted by the House, and on the eve of what is likely to be a change in the composition of standing committees so that, to use the Prime Minister's words, there will be less showboating. I think that's a very good word.

We are in a situation where the motion indicates that there's some misunderstanding or some refusal to accept the uncontradicted testimony that has been given today and every other meeting when these topics have been raised.

It's not unusual that there is a refusal to accept messages that the official opposition doesn't like. We have a suggestion here to tie up five full weeks to study the effects of the federal budget cuts proposed in budget 2025. The uncontroverted testimony we heard before the committee is that there are none, yet the motion asserts as a fact that there are cuts proposed as it relates to veteran services.

I don't think the minister could have been any more clear, and if the officials had not been cut off and had been allowed to give their more detailed, more technical, more specific testimony on these topics, I have little doubt that the minister's message would have been reinforced. You see, she does talk to them, and they brief her, so it's a fair bet that what you heard from the minister was consistent with the advice that she received and consistent with the advice that we would receive if we afforded the officials an opportunity to testify.

Alas, time is running short on the acceptance, the allowance, of showboating. Because time is running short, this is very much a last gasp.

The motion indicates that we're going to talk about the proposed changes to legislative definitions related to long-term care.

Well, those changes are no longer proposed. They're now in policy.

Then we're going to talk about "the proposed cuts to medical cannabis reimbursement". This is another one where there seems to be an abject refusal to accept the unanimous advice in the public domain with respect to medical cannabis reimbursement. It's been mis-characterized repeatedly, as has been the case with so many things, as a cut. Medical cannabis reimbursement is a matter of aligning the reimbursement price for medical cannabis to the market rate. That's to take it from \$8.50 down to \$6. This shows up because of generally accepted accounting principles, because of actuarial calculations, and because of net present value in the budget documents as a \$4.2-billion reduction in expenditure.

Let's be clear on that \$4.2 billion. Let's be very clear on what that calculation means. The medical cannabis system within Veterans Affairs is like so many other systems in Veterans Affairs. These are statutory rights that veterans have where there really isn't a discretion. If the application meets the law and meets the policy, they have a right to the service and a right to the product. That is the case with respect to medical cannabis.

The way the \$4.2 billion shows up on the books is as the present value of the future obligation of the Government of Canada with respect to medical cannabis. If you take the amount of money that would be paid out for medical cannabis over the next 30 years and bring it back to today's rate—I'm talking about the \$2.50 reduction from \$8.50 down to \$6—the net present value of that future obligation is \$4.2 billion.

This has been explained over and over and over again—in committee, on the floor of the House of Commons and through the witnesses we have had before this committee. This is simply accrual accounting. This is an actuarial calculation.

• (1220)

**Blake Richards:** I have a point of order, Chair. I'm just seeking some clarification on whether or not this is in fact a filibuster to just avoid being accountable to veterans. Are they denying that there are cuts? Is this just a filibuster so that they can avoid accountability? What is it?

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards, that's not a point of order. You're getting into debate yourself. Mr. Casey has the floor. I will allow Mr. Casey to speak, and we have to listen.

Thank you.

**Sean Casey:** All right. I'm not sure whether my colleague was bored of or convinced by the representation on medical cannabis, but we can move on.

The next part of the motion talks about the recent layoffs from the bureau of pensions advocates. How could we bring a motion today after hearing uncontroverted evidence from the only witness we heard today that there have been no layoffs and that there was a provision in budget 2023 with respect to additional staffing for the bureau of pensions advocates, essentially to deal with the backlog, that it was of a fixed duration, and that we've arrived at that date and are now reverting back to the state of steady operations?

It's quite unfortunate, actually, that Mr. Freeman didn't get a chance to complete his answer with respect to the allegations coming from the Association of Justice Counsel, the group that represents the bureau of pensions advocates. It's unfortunate that he

didn't get the chance to answer that question when I posed it to him, because we ran out of time. That's probably my fault for not managing the time appropriately, but I was foolishly thinking that the rest of the committee wanted to hear from the witnesses instead of showboating.

In any event, they didn't, so what we're left with is that the only testimony before the committee on this is that there have been no layoffs. We haven't been given the opportunity, because of the timing of this motion. I understand the urgency: It appears that the window is closing on the chance to pull stunts like this.

Madam Chair, I'm going to cede the floor now. All of this is to say that I look forward to hearing the amendment from the Bloc Québécois, if it is forthcoming, and to hearing the views of others with respect to this manoeuvre.

Thank you for the time, Madam Chair.

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Casey.

I have a list.

Ms. Hirtle, you had asked to speak.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau and Mr. d'Entremont have also asked to speak.

[*English*]

I'm going to pass the floor to Ms. Hirtle.

**Alana Hirtle:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I echo my colleague MP Casey's comments regarding the timing of this motion being suspect. The motion was put on notice in February, so I do wonder what has taken so long. Why are we just now hearing it? It is strange to say.

I am disappointed that we've shown such disrespect to the officials who prepared for this meeting and came expecting to be able to share information. Now we have lost that opportunity with them, and it's hard to say when they'll come back again.

**Blake Richards:** I have a point of order, Chair.

We certainly could have heard from officials. The Liberals could have simply voted on the motion. They seem to be trying to hide from accountability here, rather than voting on the motion and returning to—

**The Chair:** Again, that is not a point of order. Thank you very much.

I would like to allow Ms. Hirtle to speak, please.

**Blake Richards:** Chair, we're pointing out that the officials could have been heard from had you not dismissed them and had your colleagues not filibustered.

**The Chair:** People, I think we all realize.... I'll stay objective.

Ms. Hirtle, continue.

**Alana Hirtle:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Yes, it is unfortunate that we will not get to hear the responses and more detailed information from the officials who came prepared to answer our questions today.

I would also say that, as I'm new to the Hill, this is all very unusual to me, and I'm wondering if this is the norm. I would hope that we would work collaboratively to advance the needs and the well-being of veterans in our community. Are we not all here to move things forward and do better for the veterans, as we've all agreed that we wish to do? I'm here to hear about priorities for veterans, where their needs are and how we can better work together.

To that end, I presented a motion—second reading was last week—in the chamber, which relates to surplus federal properties across the country and how we can better use those to aid our veterans. It did, very happily, pass second reading, so it's now going to go to committee, where we'll hopefully come up with a list and a process for moving these properties—

[*Translation*]

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

There's not a lot of time left, and I'm trying to see if there's a connection with the notice of motion, because we don't really seem to be talking about it, and I know what's coming. We've been here before. Nice try.

[*English*]

**Alana Hirtle:** I will move on to my next point, then.

The GAAP, or generally accepted accounting principles, which Mr. Casey mentioned, are normal procedure for this kind of practice.

I do wonder.... There's indignation right now from our colleagues around the way that the reduction in the price per ounce of cannabis is being handled. This is a normal accounting practice, and I would question how many times our colleagues who were in government between 2009 and 2015 voted in favour of any of these methods on other bills.

That's good for me.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Gaudreau, the floor is yours.

**Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think the bells are going to ring in a minute or two.

I just want to highlight the process and the procedure. We have to discuss the notice of motion. This can sometimes be difficult, because people want to drag things out. I say this for all the newcom-

ers who haven't been here in recent years. We're here to study bills and to monitor the government's actions, among other things. That's why it's important to examine budget cuts.

That said, I propose amending this motion so that we instead devote five meetings to this study, given our schedule and the other motions on the table.

**The Chair:** Ms. Gaudreau has proposed an amendment. Would anyone like to speak to it?

Mr. Casey, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

**Sean Casey:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau. That was well anticipated. I suppose that's an improvement, since we would waste five fewer weeks of our time discussing a topic raised for purely partisan purposes and for which there is no basis or evidence in the testimonies we've heard. We would thus cut the wasted time in half, which is an improvement.

[*English*]

Madam Chair, I appreciate Madame Gaudreau's amendment, which is aligned with the discussions that we had to reduce the number of meetings to be dedicated to this study that was put on notice back in February, before the adoption of the budget implementation act, before the passage of the budget and before all of the testimony that we have heard since, including today's uncontradicted testimony from the minister with respect to the existence of the cuts that are the subject of this motion, which now proposes five meetings instead of 10.

If we look at the witnesses who will be invited in the event that this motion passes, and if we look at—

**Blake Richards:** I have a point of order, Chair.

I just want to see if we can get unanimous consent to sit through the bells for a period of time.

**The Chair:** I need unanimous consent, so we will—

**Sean Casey:** Are the bells ringing?

**The Chair:** Yes. I'm sorry, Mr. Casey. I didn't want to interrupt you.

We could have a possibility of 15 minutes if we have unanimous consent to continue through the bells. It's up to the members and the will of the committee.

**A voice:** No.

**Blake Richards:** I'll point out that it was the Liberals who said no.

**The Chair:** Is it the will of the committee to suspend?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** We will suspend.

*[The meeting was suspended at 12:34 p.m., Monday, April 27]*

*[The meeting resumed at 4:39 p.m., Wednesday, April 29]*

• (6435)

*[Translation]*

**The Chair:** Order, please. We are resuming our proceedings for meeting number 32 of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, which we started on Monday, April 27, 2026.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Before we continue, I would like to ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents.

• (6440)

*[English]*

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For any participant on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen you can choose the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French.

*[Translation]*

For members in the room, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. The committee clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

*[English]*

Colleagues, I will give you a brief overview of where the committee currently stands.

On Monday, April 27, the committee was studying the main estimates for 2026-27, and during that item of business, Mr. Richards moved that the committee hold a study lasting 10 meetings regarding the effect of budget 2025 on veterans. Debate arose on the motion.

*[Translation]*

Ms. Gaudreau then moved an amendment to reduce the number of meetings devoted to this study from 10 to five. During the debate on the amendment, the bells rang in the House and, since there was no unanimous consent to continue sitting, the committee had to suspend the meeting until today.

Today, we are resuming debate on Ms. Gaudreau's amendment to the motion to reduce the length of the proposed study from 10 meetings to five meetings.

*[English]*

At the time of the suspension, Mr. Casey had the floor. I must therefore recognize him first, so that he can conclude his remarks.

Mr. Casey, the floor is yours.

**Sean Casey:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to suggest that, if it is the will of the committee to continue to discuss this matter, it could be done at a meeting dedicated to committee business or in camera, and that the chair could schedule a committee business meeting to go through the calendar and the outstanding motions.

With that suggestion, I would like to move that the committee now proceed to main estimates votes.

*[Translation]*

**The Chair:** It's a dilatory motion. So we have to proceed by unanimous consent or go to a vote.

*[English]*

Do you want a recorded vote?

**Blake Richards:** On a point of clarification, Madam Chair, obviously I have concerns when we're on a motion and then we're asked to move to something else. I don't know if the government's just trying to avoid being accountable—

**The Chair:** Again, Mr. Richards, I will go.... You know what? We will have—

**Blake Richards:** Madam Chair, I need your ruling on this.

*[Translation]*

**The Chair:** It's a dilatory motion.

*[English]*

Mr. Richards, I will not accept debate on this.

**Blake Richards:** Sure, but—

**The Chair:** It's very simple. You've been here for 17 years.

**Blake Richards:** No. Hold on, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** You know very well—

**Blake Richards:** I'm looking for some clarification, because what I don't understand—

**The Chair:** The clarification is that we're going to vote. You accepted unanimous consent—

**Blake Richards:** —is what's happening. We're debating a motion to be accountable to veterans—

**The Chair:** —and if you are interrupting me, sir, I will have a problem with that.

**Blake Richards:** You interrupted me first, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** You asked for clarification—

**Blake Richards:** Yes, but you haven't given it.

**The Chair:** —and I said that this is a dilatory motion. I will stand my ground here, Mr. Richards. Please let me finish. I'm asking you two things: If you want to speak, either you want to vote—

**Blake Richards:** You won't let me finish, but I have to let you finish.

**The Chair:** —or, Mr. Richards, Mr. Casey has—

**Blake Richards:** I don't understand what's happening here. I need some clarification.

**The Chair:** It's a dilatory motion.

**Blake Richards:** How do we move from a motion we're already dealing with to another motion?

**Arnold Viersen:** You can't. You can't have two motions on the floor.

**The Chair:** There is no debate on this.

Mr. Casey, we will.... I need to know. Does the committee want to go by vote—

**Blake Richards:** This is to avoid accountability, then. We're going to move from one thing to another and completely let the government avoid accountability to veterans.

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards, if you continue to interrupt me, I will adjourn this committee.

**Blake Richards:** Why would you do that, Madam Chair? Is that to avoid accountability to veterans as well?

**The Chair:** Not at all, Mr. Richards. Mr. Casey was within his right to move a dilatory motion. It is, as it stands, something that we need to decide. Do we want to ask if there is unanimous consent, or do we want a recorded vote?

**Blake Richards:** Chair, I have a point of order, please.

**The Chair:** No, Mr. Richards—

**Blake Richards:** I'm on a point of order.

**The Chair:** —honestly, I don't have to.... I'm asking you one thing.

**Blake Richards:** Yes, you do. As a chair, you have to accept a point of order. At least hear what the point of order is before you rule against it.

**The Chair:** What is your point of order?

**Blake Richards:** My point of order is that I would like to understand, from the Standing Orders, what allows a motion that's being debated on the floor to be superseded by another motion that's just been moved by another member.

**The Chair:** It's a dilatory motion, which is part of our Standing Orders.

**Blake Richards:** I understand that.

**The Chair:** Do we go to a recorded vote?

**Blake Richards:** Chair, I would like to have—

**The Chair:** I will call the vote.

**Arnold Viersen:** Madam Chair, a dilatory motion is to adjourn the debate.

**The Chair:** I'm calling the vote.

**Blake Richards:** I would like to have the standing order cited to us, please, Chair. I don't believe this is correct.

• (6445)

**The Chair:** Yes, it is. I have my....

**Sean Casey:** There are two different—

**Blake Richards:** If that's correct, please cite it.

**Arnold Viersen:** What are the three dilatory motions? I think this is a motion with a condition, and the condition is debatable. The condition is debatable.

**The Chair:** Mr. Viersen, I haven't given you the floor, sir.

**Arnold Viersen:** The condition is debatable.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. I didn't give you the floor. Please, at least respect that. I said that this is a dilatory motion.

**Arnold Viersen:** Just because you say it is doesn't mean it is one.

**The Chair:** If you want clarification, I'll give you the standing order.

The dilatory motion is chapter 20.121, "That the committee proceed to..." and it's straight to a dilatory motion. This is it.

Do we have a recorded vote?

**Blake Richards:** I have a point of order, because I don't believe that's clarified my question.

**The Chair:** It's there in the Standing Orders.

**Blake Richards:** What in the Standing Orders allows another motion to be moved when we're already debating another motion?

**The Chair:** That's exactly the standing order. It's called a dilatory motion.

I just acknowledged this, Mr. Richards. Thank you very much.

**Blake Richards:** It just seems to me that it's an effort to avoid accountability and metrics. I—

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards, you are interrupting the chair. I think that is very inappropriate.

As I say, Mr. Casey—

**Blake Richards:** I'll tell you what's inappropriate; it's to do this to veterans.

**The Chair:** —had the floor. I would like to resume with Mr. Casey. There's no debate. This is a vote.

Do we accept unanimous consent, or do we want a recorded vote?

**Blake Richards:** We'll have a recorded vote, please.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Richards.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** We'll now go to three votes on the main estimates.

[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$1,767,834,523

Vote 5—Grants and contributions.....\$6,353,012,942

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to: yeas 6, nays 5)

• (6450)

VETERANS REVIEW AND APPEAL BOARD

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$20,066,969

(Vote 1 agreed to: yeas 6, nays 5)

**The Chair:** Shall I report the main estimates 2026-27 to the House?

(Reporting of main estimates to the House agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)      **The Chair:** Since this aspect of our business is done, I will adjourn this meeting.

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