

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

Annual Report

2008

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**Hon. Alfie MacLeod
Speaker
House of Assembly
Province House
Halifax, Nova Scotia**

Dear Mr. Speaker:

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I am pleased to submit the 2007 / 2008 Annual Report of the Committee for the Second Session of the Sixtieth General Assembly.

Respectfully submitted,

**Mr. Harold Theriault, MLA
(Digby - Annapolis)
Chair
Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs**

**Halifax, Nova Scotia
2008**



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contains recycled fibre

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Foreword

Although there is no written mandate for the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, this report was written with the understanding that the Committee was established for the purpose of considering matters pertaining to the Royal Canadian Legion and Veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces.

The report is written under individual topics outlining the concerns and issues brought forward from each group or organization.

**CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF VETERANS IN UNITED
NATIONS PEACEKEEPING**

October 11, 2007

WITNESSES

**Canadian Association of Veterans in
United Nations Peacekeeping**

Mr. Ronald Griffis – National President

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The focus of the meeting was an overview of the Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping, its duties and activities in Canada's peacekeeping roles at home and around the world. The Association also emphasized their role in assisting veterans and their families with federal benefits and services.

MOTIONS

One of the initiatives of the Association is having August 9th federally proclaimed as Peacekeeping Day.

As a result of these discussions the Standing Committee unanimously passed the following motion:

“That the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs encourages the federal government to give Royal Assent to Bill C-287, ensuring that the recognition to enact August 9th as Peacekeeping Day is followed through”.

Response to this motion from the federal Minister of Veterans Affairs was that the

“Bill was passed in the House of Commons on November 21, 2007, and is now proceeding through the Senate”.

DOCUMENTATION

There was no documentation requested.

Reference: http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/hansard//comm/va/va_2007oct11.htm

VETERANS INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM

November 15, 2007

WITNESSES

Mrs. Joyce Carter

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The focus of the meeting was on the Veterans Independence Program and the federal government's promise of extending the benefits to all widows of veterans.

MOTIONS

Following these discussions, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs unanimously agreed to the motion:

"That the Chairman of the Standing committee on Veterans Affairs correspond with both Prime Minister Harper and the Honourable Gregory Thompson, Minister of Veterans Affairs Canada calling upon them to honour the commitment made to Mrs. Carter back in 2005, to extend the VIP benefits to all widows in Canada, regardless of when their spouse may have passed away, and to honour that commitment immediately, without delay".

Response received from the federal government was as follows:

"The federal government has added more than 12,200 new entrants to the VIP". . . . "Changes to the VIP have been made allowing the primary caregiver to continue receiving VIP housekeeping and Grounds maintenance services for life: . . . The department is currently engaged in a Veterans Health Services Review. This is a key priority for Veterans Affairs Canada".

Minister of Veterans Affairs

"Please be assured that improving services for Veterans and their survivors has been an important priority for our government". . . . "Budget 2008 contains significant investment to support survivors of war veterans. It includes an extension of the Veterans Independence Program, which will ensure that all survivors receive the help they need to remain independent". . . . "With this Budget, we will spend \$282 million over the next three years to extend the VIP to more than 12,000 eligible survivors . . . our government knows that there is still more work to do and will continue to work to ensure that Veterans and their families are treated fairly".

Prime Minister's Office

DOCUMENTATION

There was no documentation requested during the meeting. Mrs. Carter forwarded correspondence between herself, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Veterans Affairs Canada to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

**FEDERAL SUPERANNUATES NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
(NOVA SCOTIA) & ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION – NOVA
SCOTIA/NUNAVUT COMMAND**

January 10, 2008

WITNESSES

Federal Superannuates National Association (Nova Scotia)

Mr. Ken Brown – Provincial Advocacy

Mr. Peter Kerr – Deputy Regional Director (Nova Scotia)

Federal Superannuates National Association (Nova Scotia)

Mr. Dave Blanchard – President

Mr. Marc Gauthier – Service Officer

Mr. Jack Hatcher – Treasurer/Chair of the Veterans & Senior Services Committee

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The focus of the meeting was to discuss Veterans Disability Benefits, which are defined as partial income and used by the province when calculating Nova Scotia Social Housing rental agreements.

MOTIONS

With respect to disability pensions that are exempted for personal income tax purposes [but] treated as income for the purposes of determining the amount of rent to be paid by disabled veterans when applying for government subsidized housing, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs unanimously agreed to the following motion:

“To recommend to the Minister of Community Services that the Committee recognized the significant service of this group and agree with them that disability pensions should not be included in determining eligibility for social housing and that the Government of Nova Scotia bring to an end the practice of including disability pension monies as part of a veteran’s income when these disabled individuals apply for financially assisted housing programs within our province; and that Nova Scotia should only use the net income of these veterans, as reported on Line 236 of the income tax and benefit return”.

Response to the correspondence from the Department of Community Services states:

“Families and seniors pay no more than 25 per cent and 30 per cent of their income on housing including heat and hot water respectively. Eligibility for public housing and the calculation of rent-geared-to-income is based upon total household income as defined by Statistics Canada in the Household Income, Facilities and Equipment data base. With respect to the calculation of rent, exempting disability pensions from the definition of income would result in significant inequities in the calculation of RGI. The province does recognize the special circumstances of veterans and excludes prisoner of war compensation, veterans’ monthly attendant allowances, special purpose allowance and the gallantry award from the definition of income for the purpose of calculating rental charges”.

DOCUMENTATION

There was no documentation requested.

**BLACK WATCH ROYAL HIGHLAND REGIMENT OF
CANADA – ATLANTIC BRANCH**

February 14, 2008

WITNESSES

Black Watch Royal Highland Regiment of Canada – Atlantic Branch

Mr. Grant Payne – Sergeant-at-Arms

Mrs. Gloria Sellar – Member

Mr. Art Snow – Vice-President

Mr. George Megeney – President, Nova Scotia Chapter

Mr. Harold Fraser – Vice – President, Nova Scotia Chapter

Mr. Charles Harb – Secretary, Nova Scotia Chapter

Mrs. Lorraine Bartlet – Invited Guest

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The focus of the meeting was an overview of the Black Watch Association and its current activities.

MOTIONS

The Committee heard testimony from members of the Black Watch Association and Mrs. Gloria Sellars as well as Mrs. Lorraine Bartlett, who spoke about Agent Orange and its effect on Veterans and their families.

The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs has unanimously passed the following motion:

“That the Veterans Affairs Minister considers the implementation of the recommendations made here today by the Atlantic Branch of the Black Watch Association”.

Recommendations of the Black Watch Association:

Literacy

Most appeal board staff are civilians who have no experience with military matters and do not understand the conditions veterans experienced during their military careers. Most of these veterans have very limited education since they joined the military at an early age. This is a disadvantage for them when dealing with the appeal board of Veterans Affairs Canada. It was suggested that,

“Experienced veterans should sit on Veteran Affairs Appeal Panels who understand military issues; and

A partnership between the federal government and a provincial agency should be developed to assist veterans and/or their spouses in filling out the necessary forms when appearing before appeals tribunals”.

Widows

In regard to the events surrounding Agent Orange, the *ex gratia* payments received by some widows were appreciated, but there are still some who have not receive it. The issue is that a soldier had to be alive on February 6, 2006 in order to qualify for the *ex gratia* or for his widow to qualify for the caregiver's dividends. It was suggested that,

“The *ex gratia* payments should be provided to the widows whose spouse died before February 6, 2006.

It was also stated that when a veterans dies his service pension is cut to 50 per cent as well as his Veterans Affairs pension. The surviving spouse, many of whom can no longer afford to remain in their homes or pay for decent rental accommodations, are living in substandard places or have to move in with relatives. Still many have ill children who need special attention. It was suggested that,

“Veterans pensions should be increased so that these widows could remain in their own homes”.

Response from the Federal Minister is as follows:

"I appreciate being made aware of the Regiment's concerns regarding appointments to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. Members of the Board are selected through a transparent appointment process. Calls for applications are made publicly. This process ensures that members have the skills and abilities required for the work and to maintain the confidence of Veterans in the appeals system. The Board's selection criteria has never excluded members of the military or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

In regard to the concern surrounding the difficulty some Veterans may experience in attempting to complete departmental forms, Clients in need of assistance are encouraged to contact the Department for help . . . it should also be noted that no forms are required to initiate an appeal of a departmental decision.

In regard to the February 6, 2006, eligibility cut-off date for the ex gratia payment, as a government, we had to make difficult decisions in order to resolve this issue. These included identifying eligibility criteria and dates. The date of February 6, 2006 was chosen as it is also the date that the new government came into power and took responsibility for resolving this issue.

With respect to the matter of survivor pensions, please note that the intent of Canada's disability pension legislation is to compensate Veterans for service-related disabilities. Although Veterans Affairs Canada provides survivor pensions based on pensioners' disabilities, it was never the intent to compensate survivors to the same extent as the Veterans who actually suffered the disability. The survivor of a deceased disability pensioner may receive, for a period of one year following the disability pensioner's death, the monthly pension amount and any allowances that were in payment to the pensioner. Thereafter, benefits convert to either the full or proportionate survivor's rate."

Through the Veterans Independence Program, the Department may provide benefits and services to eligible Veterans in an effort to help them remain health and independent in their own homes and communities. Housekeeping and grounds maintenance benefits under the VIP can also be extended to a survivor following a Veteran's death. Earlier this year, an extension to the VIP was announced that will ensure that even more survivors are able to maintain tier independence in their own homes."

DOCUMENTATION

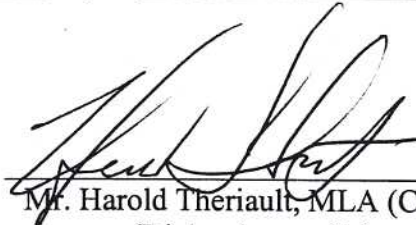
The committee has received additional documentation from the presenters on the topic in question.


Reference: http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/hansard/comm/va/va_2008feb14.htm

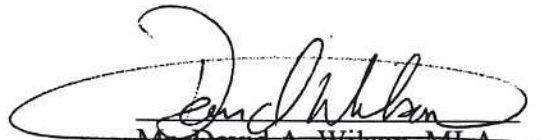
STATEMENT OF SUBMISSION

All of which is respectfully submitted to the House of Assembly

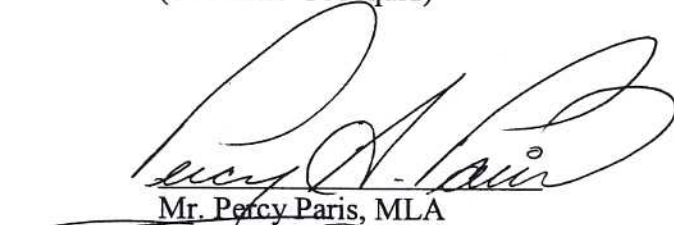
This 4th day of December, 2008



Mr. Harold Theriault, MLA (Chair)
(Digby-Annapolis)

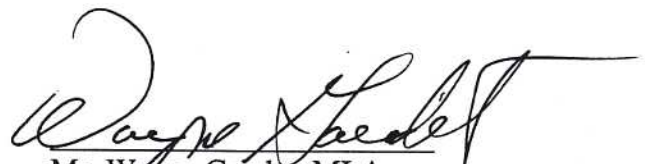

Mr. Keith Bain, MLA
(Victoria -The Lakes)

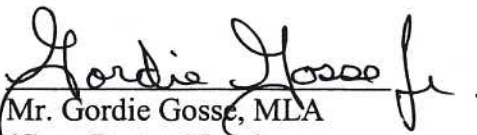

Mr. David A. Wilson, MLA
(Sackville-Cobequid)



Mr. Pat Dunn, MLA
(Pictou Centre)


Mr. Percy Paris, MLA
(Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank)


Mr. Chuck Porter, MLA
(Hants West)


Mr. Wayne Gaudet, MLA
(Clare)


Mr. Gordie Gosse, MLA
(Cape Breton Nova)


Mr. Manning MacDonald, MLA
(Cape Breton South)

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP & MEETINGS

Committee Membership

During the Second Session of the Sixtieth General Assembly of the House of Assembly, the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs was comprised of the following members:

Mr. Harold Theriault, MLA (Chair)
(Digby-Annapolis)

Mr. David A. Wilson, MLA
(Sackville-Cobequid)

Mr. Keith Bain, MLA
(Victoria-The Lakes)

Mr. Percy Paris, MLA
(Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank)

Mr. Pat Dunn, MLA
(Pictou Centre)

Mr. Wayne Gaudet, MLA
(Clare)

Mr. Chuck Porter, MLA
(Hants West)

Mr. Manning MacDonald, MLA
(Cape Breton South)

Mr. Gordie Gosse, MLA
(Cape Breton Nova)

Committee Meetings

The Standing Committee has been meeting on Thursdays since its establishment, and all meetings are open to the public. During the Second Session of the Sixtieth General Assembly the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs met on the following dates.

October 11, 2007

November 15, 2007

January 10, 2008

February 14, 2008

NOTICES, TRANSCRIPTS & REPORTS

Notices

Notices of committee meetings are sent to all members of the Committee, support staff of the caucus' and Legislative Library, the House of Assembly Press Gallery, the government wire services and is published on the internet.

Transcripts

Transcripts of the Committee meetings are available from the Legislative Committees Office, 3rd Floor, Dennis Building, 1740 Granville Street, P.O. Box 2630 Station M, Halifax, NS B3J 3N5 or from the Legislature web-site:

http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/COMMITTEES/veteran_affairs.html

Reports

All reports of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs are compiled by the Legislative Committees Office and forwarded to the Committee members for consideration. Once the report is finalized it is then distributed to the following:

To the Speaker, all members of the Committee, Government House Leader and Opposition Leaders, all witnesses who appeared before the Committee, the Legislative Library, Legislative Libraries in all provinces and territories, and all provincial caucuses. The report is also available to the general public upon request through the Legislative Committees Office and on the Legislature's website at the following address: <http://www.gov.ns.ca/legislature/COMMITTEES/index.html>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs wishes to extend its gratitude to the following:

Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping; Mrs. Joyce Carter; Federal Superannuates National Association (Nova Scotia); Royal Canadian Legion – Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command; Black Watch Royal Highland Regiment of Canada – Atlantic Branch.

For their time and cooperation, special thanks is extended to Mr. Robert Kinsman, Manager of Hansard; and Hansard Staff; to Mr. Jim MacInnes, Co-ordinator of Legislative Television; and Legislative Television Staff; Mr. Michael Laffin, Co-ordinator, House of Assembly Operations; and House of Assembly Staff; and to Ms. Margaret Murphy, Legislative Librarian and Library Staff.