

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS



ANNUAL REPORT

2011

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Honourable Gordie Gosse
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 Annual Report of the committee for the period from September, 2010 to August, 2011 of the Sixty-first General Assembly.

Respectfully submitted,

Gary Burrill, MLA, Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley
Chair
Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

Halifax, Nova Scotia
2011



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INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, an all-party committee of the House of Assembly, was struck at the beginning of the First Session of the Sixty-first General Assembly, pursuant to Rule 60(1) of the *Province of Nova Scotia Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly*.

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

MEMBERSHIP

There shall be no more than nine Members of the Legislative Assembly appointed to this committee. The current membership of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs is as follows:

Mr. Gary Burrill, MLA – Chair
Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley

Hon. Wayne Gaudet, MLA
Clare

Mr. Jim Boudreau, MLA – Vice Chair
Guysborough-Sheet Harbour

Mr. Harold Theriault, MLA
Digby-Annapolis

Ms. Michèle Raymond, MLA
Halifax Atlantic

Mr. Alfie MacLeod, MLA
Cape Breton West

Ms. Lenore Zann, MLA
Truro-Bible Hill

Mr. Chuck Porter, MLA
Hants West

Mr. Howard Epstein, MLA
Halifax Chebucto

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

During the period from September, 2010 to August, 2011 of the Sixty-first General Assembly, the committee underwent the following membership changes:

Mr. Clarrie MacKinnon was replaced by Mr. Howard Epstein.

Mr. Sidney Prest was replaced by Ms. Lenore Zann.

Mr. Allan MacMaster was replaced by Mr. Chuck Porter.

PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONS

The Veterans Affairs Committee traditionally meets once a month. These meetings are usually held on the second Thursday of the month in the Legislative Committees Office. During the period from September, 2010 to August, 2011 of the Sixty-first General Assembly, the committee met on the following dates:

September 9, 2010
October 7, 2010
February 10, 2011
March 10, 2011

The committee was also scheduled to meet on January 12, 2011. The witness for this meeting was the Honourable Jean-Pierre Blackburn, Minister of Veterans Affairs. However, this meeting was cancelled due to witness unavailability.

In addition to the above meetings, committee members participated in a tour of the submarine HMCS Corner Brook on October 21, 2010, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, as well as a tour of the former Debert Bunker site in Debert, Nova Scotia, on June 9, 2011.

The committee agreed not to hold meetings when the House of Assembly is in session.

NOTICES, TRANSCRIPTS AND REPORTS

NOTICES

Notice of committee meetings are sent to all members of the committee, caucus office staff, legislative staff and Communications Nova Scotia. The notices are also posted in Province House and on the Nova Scotia Legislature website at the following address:

<http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/calendar/>

TRANSCRIPTS

Transcripts of all Veterans Affairs Committee meetings are available from the Legislative Library in Province House, the Legislative Committees Office, or on the Veterans Affairs Committee website at the following address:

http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/committees/committee_hansard/C11/

REPORTS

All reports of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs are compiled by the Legislative Committees Office and forwarded to committee members for consideration. Upon completion of the review and approval of the report, the Chair tables the report with the Speaker of the House of Assembly or with the Clerk of the House of Assembly.

Distribution of the report is as follows, to: the Speaker and the Clerk of the House of Assembly; committee members; all witnesses who appeared before the committee; the Nova Scotia Legislative Library; the caucus offices; and the House of Assembly Press Gallery. This report is also available to the general public upon request from the Legislative Committees Office and is available on the committee's website at the following address: http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/committees/reports/veterans_affairs

RESEARCH MATERIAL

Research material for the Veterans Affairs Committee is compiled by the Legislative Library in consultation with the committee clerk and distributed to members by the committee clerk. Reference material is provided to committee members and caucus staff prior to the meeting date. A copy of this material is also made available to the witnesses appearing before the committee, to the Legislative Library in Province House and to Hansard Reporting Services.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The committee wishes to extend its gratitude to all witnesses for their time and co-operation; to the staff of the Legislative Committees Office for their coordination of committee meetings; and to Ms. Heather Ludlow, Information Services Librarian, for the organization of research for committee meetings. Others whose assistance has been invaluable to the committee are: Mr. Robert Kinsman, Editor of Hansard Reporting Services, and staff; Mr. James MacInnes, Coordinator/Director of Legislative Television and Broadcast Services, and staff; and Ms. Margaret Murphy, Legislative Librarian, and staff.

WITNESSES

September 9, 2010	Veterans Affairs Canada-Atlantic Region Re: Merchant Navy Veterans
September 9, 2010	Organizational Meeting
October 7, 2010	Office of the Veterans Ombudsman
February 10, 2011	Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations Re: Legion Capital Assistance Fund
February 10, 2011	Royal Canadian Legion – Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command Re: Condition of Legion Facilities
March 10, 2011	Military/RCMP Veterans Against Annuity Benefit Reduction at Age 65

**PUBLIC
HEARINGS**

MERCHANT NAVY VETERANS

September 9, 2010

WITNESSES

Veterans Affairs Canada – Atlantic Region

Ms. Krista Locke – Regional Director General

Ms. Lorraine Gailey – Regional Director Communications

Mr. Gordon Thomas – Client Service Team Manager

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

Veterans Affairs Canada provides services and benefits to Canadian veterans and their families, in recognition of their contributions to world peace. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an overview of the support provided to Merchant Navy veterans, with a particular focus on recognition, compensation, pensions and benefits.

MOTIONS

There were no motions.

DOCUMENTATION

The following information was requested and received:

- Merchant Navy Veterans were not eligible for post-secondary education benefits. Was there any attempt to calculate the value of that over a lifetime when calculating the special benefit?
- How was the \$20,000.00 compensation payment arrived at?
- Where do the Nova Scotia Merchant Navy Veterans live?
- How many Nova Scotia Merchant Navy Veterans or spouses received the special benefit?
- How many Merchant Navy Veterans' spouses in Nova Scotia are receiving benefits?
- Why was there a time limitation put in place within which Merchant Navy Veterans had to apply for the special award?

TRANSCRIPT

Further details of this meeting can be found in the transcript which is available on-line at: http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/committees/committee_hansard/C11/va_2010sep09

ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

September 9, 2010

WITNESSES

No witnesses were present at this meeting.

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The committee met to organize their agenda of potential witnesses and topics for future meetings.

The committee reviewed the response it received from the Minister of Community Services with respect to correspondence the committee had written to the minister on behalf of the Royal Canadian Legion following its appearance before the committee on November 26, 2009. Members expressed concern regarding whether the correspondence to the minister accurately reflected the Legion's concern regarding the treatment of veterans' disability pensions when applying for public housing. The committee agreed to correspondence being written to the Legion to determine whether the appropriate information had been requested from the minister.

MOTIONS

The Annual Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs was reviewed. Some minor changes were suggested and agreed to by the committee. The following motion was passed by the committee:

“That we approve our annual report for the Veterans Affairs Standing Committee of the House for 2010.”

DOCUMENTATION

There were no documents requested.

TRANSCRIPT

Further details of this meeting can be found in the transcript which is available on-line at: http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/committees/committee_hansard/C11/va_2010sep09

WITNESSES

Office of the Veterans Ombudsman

Colonel (Retired) Patrick B. Stogran – Veterans Ombudsman

Ms. Colleen Soltermann – Director of Strategic Liaison

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The Veterans Ombudsman is an independent officer who reports to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and who works to ensure the fair treatment of Veterans and their families. The purpose of the meeting was to obtain information regarding the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman, including its role, mandate and services.

MOTIONS

This meeting was held in the Legislative Chamber at the Nova Scotia Legislature due to repairs being undertaken at the Legislative Committees Office. Meetings held in the chamber can be broadcast by Legislative Television. As it was possible to broadcast the proceedings of this meeting, a motion was passed as follows:

To have Legislative Television broadcast and podcast the proceedings for this meeting.

It was noted by a committee member that Nova Scotians would benefit from all committee proceedings being broadcast by Legislative Television.

DOCUMENTATION

The following information was requested and received:

- A list of the issues (approximately 4000) that your office has resolved.
- How many complaints or how many issues have you had about the Legions in this province?

TRANSCRIPT

Further details of this meeting can be found in the transcript which is available on-line at: http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/committees/committee_hansard/C11/va_2010oct07

LEGION CAPITAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

February 10, 2011

WITNESSES

Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations

Mr. Kevin Malloy – Deputy Minister

Mr. Marvin MacDonald – Executive Director, Municipal Services

Ms. Aileen Waller-Hebb – Acting Director, Grants and Programs, Municipal Services

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The Legion Capital Assistance Program is a program that is administered by Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations to assist Legions with repairs and upgrades to their facilities. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an overview of the Legion Capital Assistance Program.

MOTIONS

There were no motions.

DOCUMENTATION

There were no documents requested.

TRANSCRIPT

Further details of this meeting can be found in the transcript which is available on-line at: http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/committees/committee_hansard/C11/va_2011feb10

CONDITION OF LEGION FACILITIES

February 10, 2011

WITNESSES

Royal Canadian Legion – Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command

Mr. Les Nash – Command President

Mr. Jack Hatcher – Chairman, Veterans Services and Seniors Committee

Mr. Dave Blanchard – Member, Veterans Services and Seniors Committee

Mr. Brian Richardson – Command Service Officer

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The Royal Canadian Legion is Canada’s Largest Veterans Organization which serves military and RCMP veterans, their families and communities and promotes remembrance. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an overview of the condition of Legion facilities.

MOTIONS

A re-occurring issue of concern for the Command with respect to Bingo is the taxation of “Cookie Jar” winnings. The committee discussed its correspondence to the Minister of Finance in 2009, on behalf of the Command, regarding the taxation of “Cookie Jar” winnings. It was determined that the correspondence did not speak to the exact issue that was of concern to the Command. The committee passed a motion as follows:

That the committee re-submit a request to the Minister of Finance to remove the 2.5 per cent tax charged to Legions with regard to ‘Cookie Jar’ winnings specifically.

A response has been received from the Minister of Finance indicating that the matter is the responsibility of the Alcohol and Gaming Division (AGD) of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations.

The Honourable John MacDonell, Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations, then provided the following response:

“There is one solution that I will propose that may alleviate your problem. I have spoken with our staff at AGD and they have indicated that while you have stated that 100% of the monies paid into the “cookie jar” are awarded back out as prizes, this is not necessary. They have proposed that it is acceptable for the 2.13% fee to be deducted from the building jackpot in the “cookie jar” and that the remaining 97.85% be paid to the winning player. If this is something that you wish to pursue, the staff at AGD are more than willing to discuss the logistics with you at your convenience.”

The Command indicated to the committee that it would be helpful if they could have discussions with the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations with

respect to the Legion Capital Assistance Program. The committee passed a motion as follows:

That the committee write to the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations to request that a meeting be arranged between the department and representatives from the Legion Command regarding the Legion Capital Assistance Program.

The Honourable John MacDonell, Minister of Service Nova Scotia, has provided the following response:

“The Department would be pleased to meet with Nova Scotia/Nunavut Legion Command representatives to discuss the Legion Capital Assistance Program.

Please contact Aileen Waller-Hebb, P.Eng., Director of Grants of Programs to set up a convenient meeting time.”

The Command expressed concern to committee members regarding the repair needs of Legion facilities. The committee passed a motion as follows:

That the Nova Scotia Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs write to the Department of Veterans Affairs requesting financial support in the form of a grant matching the funding provided by the Province of Nova Scotia under the Legion Capital Assistance Program to assist Legions to repair their facilities.

The Honourable Steven Blaney, Minister of Veterans Affairs, has provided the following response:

“Veterans Affairs Canada has an ongoing positive relationship with the Legion and has partnered with this Veterans organization on many initiatives. However, I must inform you that projects involving capital costs, such as repairs to facilities, are not eligible for funding from the Department.”

DOCUMENTATION

There were no documents requested.

TRANSCRIPT

Further details of this meeting can be found in the transcript which is available on-line at: http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/committees/committee_hansard/C11/va_2011feb10

**MILITARY/RCMP VETERANS AGAINST ANNUITY BENEFIT
REDUCTION AT AGE 65**

March 10, 2011

WITNESSES

Military/RCMP Veterans Against Annuity Benefit Reduction at Age 65

Mr. John Labelle – Campaign Coordinator

Mr. Melvin (Mel) Pittman – Webmaster

MATTERS OF DISCUSSION

The Military/RCMP Veterans Against Annuity Benefit Reduction at Age 65 campaign is supported by veterans who are seeking to end the reduction of veterans' pensions upon receipt of Canada Pension Plan Benefits. The purpose of the meeting was to obtain an overview of the campaign, including Private Members Bill C-201.

MOTIONS

The committee had previously written to the Honourable Peter MacKay indicating its support for Bill C-201 and urging the federal government to reconsider the bill. After hearing the information provided by the witnesses, the committee passed a motion as follows:

In light of further information being received about the subject, that the committee write to federal officials to express its concern with the response provided by the Honourable Peter MacKay to the committee's request that the Government of Canada re-examine the proposals set out in Private Member's Bill C-201; and that the committee asks the federal government to reconsider its position on the issue, with a view to achieving fairness for members of the Armed Forces and RCMP, including disabled members, their spouses and families. As well, the committee would suggest that in the interim, the federal government ensure that a full debate is held on the issue in the House of Commons; explore the matter at committee; or, have the issue reviewed by an arms length pension expert.

A response has been received from the federal Department of Finance indicating that they have forwarded the committee's letter to the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Veterans Affairs, as this issue falls within their responsibilities.

The following response has also been received from the Office of the Prime Minister:

"You may be assured that the views expressed in the motion have been noted. A copy of your correspondence has been forwarded to the Honourable Peter MacKay, Minister of National Defence, so that he may be made aware of the Committee's continuing interest in this matter."

The following response has also been received from the Honourable Peter MacKay, Minister of National Defence:

“While I appreciate your concerns and understand the importance to retired Canadian Forces (CF) members of the issue you have raised, I believe that the CF pension plans are among the best in the country and that is how it should be. However, there is a special challenge in striking a reasonable balance between the level of benefits desired and the ability of plan members and the Canadian taxpayer to pay for those benefits.”

“Pensions payable under the *Canadian Forces Superannuation Act* have a number of features not found in private sector plans, including the basic pension formulas providing a secure benefit, benefits payable to survivors, and cost-of-living indexing. CF pension arrangements also contain certain features that recognize the special demands that are placed on members.”

“Regarding the integration of CF pensions with those payable under the CPP...this approach is in line with that taken by the majority of large public and private sector pension plans in Canada. ... the change you propose would substantially increase plan costs, requiring higher pension contributions from members and further funding from Canadian taxpayers, who in many cases participate in less favourable pension plans, if at all. Additionally, as a change in current policy would have national consequences, any proposed amendments would require considerable study and consultation within both the public and private sectors. However, in these times of careful fiscal management, I do not believe that this type of initiative would be in the best interests of the CF and Canadians generally.”

The committee awaits a response from the Honourable Vic Toews, Minister of Public Safety.

NOTE: Responses were received after the reporting period of the report but prior to printing from the Honourable Gail Shea, Minister of National Revenue, and the Honourable Steven Blaney, Minister of Veterans Affairs.

DOCUMENTATION

There were no documents requested.

TRANSCRIPT

Further details of this meeting can be found in the transcript which is available on-line at: http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/committees/committee_hansard/C11/va_2011mar10

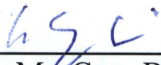
STATEMENT

OF

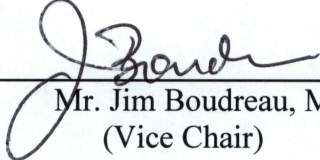
SUBMISSION

STATEMENT OF SUBMISSION

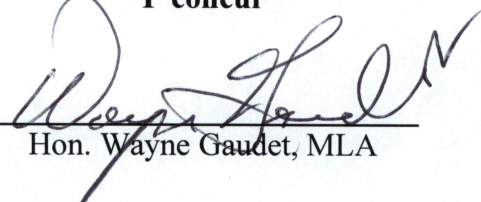
All of which is respectfully submitted to the
House of Assembly this 13th day of October, 2011


Mr. Gary Burrill, MLA
Chair

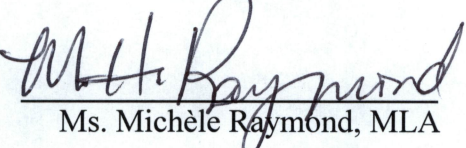
I concur


Mr. Jim Boudreau, MLA
(Vice Chair)

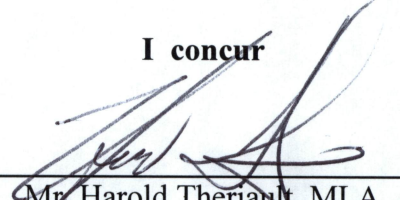
I concur


Hon. Wayne Gaudet, MLA

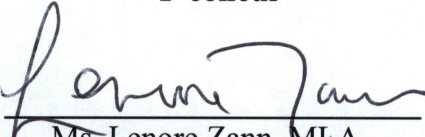
I concur


Ms. Michèle Raymond, MLA

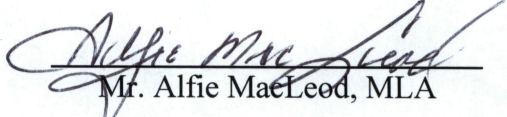
I concur


Mr. Harold Theriault, MLA


I concur


Ms. Lenore Zann, MLA

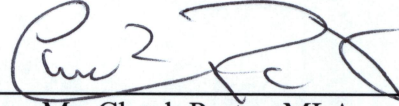
I concur


Mr. Alfie MacLeod, MLA

I concur


Mr. Howard Epstein, MLA

I concur


Mr. Chuck Porter, MLA

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - MOTIONS

The following is a list of motions of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs:

Organizational Meeting – September 9, 2010

That we approve our annual report for the Veterans Affairs Standing Committee of the House for 2010.

Office of the Veterans Ombudsman – October 7, 2010

To have Legislative Television broadcast and podcast the proceedings for this meeting.

Royal Canadian Legion – Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command – Condition of Legion Facilities - February 10, 2011

That the committee re-submit a request to the Minister of Finance to remove the 2.5 per cent tax charged to Legions with regard to ‘Cookie Jar’ winnings specifically.

That the committee write to the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations to request that a meeting be arranged between the department and representatives from the Legion Command regarding the Legion Capital Assistance Program.

That the Nova Scotia Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs write to the Department of Veterans Affairs requesting financial support in the form of a grant matching the funding provided by the Province of Nova Scotia under the Legion Capital Assistance Program to assist Legions to repair their facilities.

Military/RCMP Veterans Against Annuity Benefit Reduction at Age 65 – March 10, 2011

In light of further information being received about the subject, that the committee write to federal officials to express its concern with the response provided by the Honourable Peter MacKay to the committee’s request that the Government of Canada re-examine the proposals set out in Private Member’s Bill C-201; and that the committee asks the federal government to reconsider its position on the issue, with a view to achieving fairness for members of the Armed Forces and RCMP, including disabled members, their spouses and families. As well, the committee would suggest that in the interim, the federal government ensure that a full debate is held on the issue in the House of Commons; explore the matter at committee; or, have the issue reviewed by an arms length pension expert.

APPENDIX B - DOCUMENTATION

The following is a list of documents and information requested and received by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs:

Veterans Affairs Canada – Atlantic Regional – Merchant Navy Veterans - September 9, 2010

- Merchant Navy Veterans were not eligible for post-secondary education benefits. Was there any attempt to calculate the value of that over a lifetime when calculating the special benefit?
- How was the \$20,000.00 compensation payment arrived at?
- Where do the Nova Scotia Merchant Navy Veterans live?
- How many Nova Scotia Merchant Navy Veterans or spouses received the special benefit?
- How many Merchant Navy Veterans' spouses in Nova Scotia are receiving benefits?
- Why was there a time limitation put in place within which Merchant Navy Veterans had to apply for the special award?

Office of the Veterans Ombudsman - October 7, 2010

- A list of the issues (approximately 4000) that your office has resolved.
- How many complaints or how many issues have you had about the Legions in this province?

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