

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Thursday, October 25, 2001

Committee Room 1

Organizational Meeting

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

William Langille (Chair)
John Holm
Jerry Pye
Mark Parent
David Hendsbee
David Wilson (Cape Breton East)
John Chataway
Cecil O'Donnell
Frank Chipman
Brian Boudreau

[John Chataway was replaced by James DeWolfe.]

In Attendance:

Darlene Henry
Legislative Committee Clerk



HALIFAX, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2001
STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

11:00 A.M.

CHAIR
William Langille

THE CHAIR: Order, please. If I could have your attention we will start the meeting. At this time I would like to have introductions around the table, starting with myself.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Today we have some correspondence I will be going through but first, just as background, the person we had in here who was a prisoner of war in a concentration camp in World War II in Buchenwald, Bill Gibson, he received monetary recognition for injustices done and I believe it was \$5,000-plus, which we are very happy about.

The other item is that the Walter Callow Bus has been purchased and there has been money obtained through their fundraising and from departments of government, so we are very pleased with that. You all have your invitations for the Walter Callow ceremony?

JOHN HOLM: Mr. Chairman, I was just wondering, do we know how much provincial government money went in to assist with the purchase?

THE CHAIR: I am not sure but we can check on that.

JOHN HOLM: It would be interesting to find out how much did go in and also to find out if this committee hearing had any input or any effect upon their ability to get some of that assistance.

THE CHAIR: We sent letters out to the departments, so I would think we did have an effect on any money obtained.

JOHN HOLM: It would be interesting to know which and how much, just for information purposes. If not, fine.

THE CHAIR: We will get that information and get back to you at the next meeting.

The Provincial Command of the Nova Scotia Legion wishes to meet with us on November 15th. At that time they will be giving a presentation and also, there is a Mr. Steve Wessel, Public Relations Chairman for the Nova Scotia Provincial Command. He will be giving a presentation to obtain and purchase veterans' personalized license plates for veterans' vehicles. I had discussions with Darlene Henry and I think it might be a good idea to have somebody from the Department of Transportation and Public Works here to listen in on that. I would like to have your opinion on that.

JOHN HOLM: Certainly, anybody is welcome to come as a guest to hear the presentation and certainly someone from the Department of Transportation and Public Works would be, I think, welcome. If they are going to be speaking, of course, they would have to have the permission of the committee, but I would have no objection because they may be able to answer some of the questions right then and there, so I think it is a good idea.

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, is this in relation to the license plate issue?

THE CHAIR: Yes, it is.

JERRY PYE: Then that is not the Department of Transportation, but Service Nova Scotia and someone from Service Nova Scotia should be present.

THE CHAIR: You are right, thank you for bringing that to my attention. It's hard to keep up with all the changes, isn't it? So that would be November 15th at 9:00 a.m or 0900 hours.

We have received a letter from MLA John Chataway. He received a letter from the Royal Canadian Naval Association and they are looking to obtain a personal tax break of \$5,000 on their taxable income. They don't wish to meet with us but they are looking for our support for this tax break. I was thinking maybe we should send a letter directly to the association and ask them to correspond with us on it to see what they actually want from us.

JOHN HOLM: The letter from Mr. Chataway didn't forward a copy of the request to him?

THE CHAIR: We have the letter from . . .

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, if I may, I believe Mr. Chataway is asking for the Veterans Affairs Committee to endorse the veterans' pension from being tax exempt, I believe that is

what they are talking about. That is a federal jurisdiction and he is probably looking for us to send a message on to the federal government via the Veterans Affairs Committee to endorse this tax exemption credit. It is only on the amount of the Veterans Affairs' pension benefit that they do receive. Is that correct?

MARK PARENT: No, not really.

JERRY PYE: Isn't it.

JOHN HOLM: No, and maybe it would be helpful if the letter that . . .

JERRY PYE: Then I think we should expand upon it, Mr. Chairman, if we are not sure because I think I agree with my colleague, the member for Sackville-Cobequid and yourself, that it might be wise and advisable to contact the Royal Canadian Naval Association and ask them for direct input as to what they would like us to do.

JOHN HOLM: We have the letter here that was sent by Mr. Skinner from Niagara Falls to the Prime Minister and that is really what they are dealing with. Would it be helpful if somebody read that letter out?

THE CHAIR: The letter to Jean Chretien?

JOHN HOLM: Yes, July 4th, we have all got that letter. It is really asking for a tax break of \$5,000 in the net income section.

JERRY PYE: In John Chataway's memo it just says veterans, a tax break.

MARK PARENT: I thought that veterans receive support, don't they?

THE CHAIR: Well, the Naval Association apparently doesn't receive any type of personal tax break.

JOHN HOLM: Do other veterans?

MARK PARENT: I thought other veterans did. I could be wrong.

JOHN HOLM: I think before we write any letter of support or so on, we should try to find out what type of tax breaks - to use their term - are afforded to other veterans of that and other wars, if any.

THE CHAIR: Actually, we could find out on November 15th when we meet with the Provincial Command.

JOHN HOLM: Or a simple call to the income tax department would tell you too.

DAVID WILSON: Mr. Chairman, we should contact both Revenue Canada and the Department of Veterans Affairs to find out exactly what is available to veterans out there in the context of what they are asking for, why they don't get it or if, indeed, they get something or whatever the case may be, just to get some information.

THE CHAIR: Do you want to put that in the form of a motion?

DAVID WILSON: I will put that in the form of a motion then, that we contact officials for Veterans Affairs and Revenue Canada to follow up on this letter to Mr. Chataway and to get the information necessary to bring before the committee.

JERRY PYE: I second that motion.

THE CHAIR: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

JOHN HOLM: Maybe we could then add 'just received this correspondence' and bring it forward at a future meeting when the information is available?

THE CHAIR: Now we also have a letter from MLA Tim Olive, with regard to the Juno Beach Centre, from Douglas W. Shanks, Associate Director, and he would like to meet with us and give a presentation of what their group is attempting to do. I am looking at some time in January. Is that agreed for a date to be set?

It is agreed.

That brings us to the Post Cards, doesn't it. There will be Post Cards going out again to school children and I will do a resolution in the House on the Post Cards. Actually, there will be a press conference at the Legislature, I believe it is to take place November 9th, Friday, 10:00 a.m. and at that time the PanCanadian and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union will also be in attendance. They are the major sponsors for the program this year along with the Royal Canadian Legions. The Provincial Command will also be there and will be speaking at that time and anybody else who wishes to say something too, at that time.

JOHN HOLM: I assume there will be a government representative there speaking as well?

THE CHAIR: If there is it would be Gordon Balser. He was the one behind these Post Cards a few years back, unless you had somebody else in mind?

JOHN HOLM: I was wondering if, really, you were?

THE CHAIR: Yes, I will be speaking. Is there anything else on the agenda? Mr. DeWolfe.

JAMES DEWOLFE: Mr. Chairman, just a simple question with regard to poppies. I, as well as some other members, probably, have had requests from the Air Force Association and various organizations about getting pins to place in the centre of a poppy. One veteran told me that if you put a pin through the poppy you are defacing the poppy and I am just wondering what the official answer is on that. I will supply them, but they were looking for 100 pins to put in poppies for their members, to put in the centre of the poppy to pin it onto their lapel. If it is in fact defacing the poppy and what the poppy represents, I don't want to have any part of it.

THE CHAIR: Well, I know my own personal opinion of it, I don't like it, but I think I will make a telephone call to the Provincial Command and find out, would that be all right?

JOHN HOLM: That is an issue that has popped up from time to time for quite some time.

THE CHAIR: Yes, popped up. (Laughter)

MARK PARENT: The other thing about poppies that I didn't know and I got into great trouble is that after 11:00 a.m. on November 11th, you are supposed to lay it on the cenotaph, you take it off and not keep it on.

JAMES DEWOLFE: Oh, really. I thought that was only if you had lost a loved one.

MARK PARENT: No, it is not supposed to be worn after that time as a mark of respect.

THE CHAIR: However, there are other places - I know, myself, I have to lay a wreath at 11:00 a.m. and also lay one in the afternoon at 1:00 p.m., so there are different times.

MARK PARENT: In the Legions in my area they don't like the flag stuck through the poppy but I don't know if that is just personal taste.

THE CHAIR: There are traditions but we will find out. I have my own feelings on it and I am certainly not doing it. The other thing is at the Legislature, the Lieutenant Governor gets the first poppy before any should be worn by the members, we are clear on that, I believe.

JERRY PYE: I am very pleased to see that you are looking into defacing the poppy because I know a number of MLAs, since I have sat in the Legislature over time, have used their Legislature pin to keep their poppy on. I have been told by the Legions, much the same as Mark, that that is defacing the poppy and they take offence to it. It would be good to get

some clarity on what you can or cannot do with the poppy. It would be good also, to follow up just what is expected once you wear the poppy and so on, so there might be some background information that we might want to have on that whole history.

[11:15 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: Also, about laying them on the cenotaph afterwards.

JERRY PYE: That is right.

THE CHAIR: I have certainly seen it done. Usually they would have a World War II helmet to put them in, I have seen that done, also. Is there any other business?

JAMES DEWOLFE: I was just wondering, Mr. Chairman, just to follow up, first of all I am very pleased to see the Walter Callow wheelchair bus organization has purchased a new bus. It is certainly something we talked about when I served on this committee for a couple of years.

The other thing I am concerned about and it is a concern that has reared in my constituency more than once, is that sometimes seniors or veterans are not really aware - and it is probably their own responsibility to find out - of what is available to them as veterans. Often, I have to do a little leg work in that regard, so it seems to me Veterans Affairs should be more in touch with veterans. I am talking about people who never contacted anyone, they never used a pension, now they are getting elderly and don't realize there are things available to them through Veterans Affairs that they will fund. It seems to me Veterans Affairs should take some responsibility ensuring that the remaining veterans - and God love them, there are not that many left anymore - are more aware of what is available to them. I just throw that out.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Holm.

JOHN HOLM: I guess I have a question. Does Veterans Affairs have brochures or whatever that they make available upon request to veterans and so on, that outline all of the services and so on? Maybe we could just contact them and if they do, ask them to send a number of copies so that they could be provided to MLAs, to assist them with directing comments to the appropriate source.

JERRY PYE: I do want to say that in the Seniors' Directory, there is a small, brief outline of Veterans Affairs and their responsibilities, also a number. If any seniors have a copy of the Seniors' Directory, which I would recommend to every senior because there are a whole host of programs and services in that directory available to seniors. They can call if there is any doubt and contact Veterans Affairs with respect to what programs there are available to them. Nonetheless, . . .

JAMES DEWOLFE: The old widower out in Barney's River that lives up a lonely road and he is all by himself, he doesn't get the Seniors' Directory and probably doesn't even know it exists and that sort of thing. In my mind, it wouldn't be that difficult to zone in on those who are left and have a mail-out sent to them by Veterans Affairs. I feel it is almost their responsibility to look after these people.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Wilson, did you want to comment on that?

DAVID WILSON: No, not on that but if we have a few minutes, I do have . . .

THE CHAIR: Just before we go there . . .

JERRY PYE: Are we finished with the November 15th request for the Royal Canadian Provincial Command?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

JERRY PYE: We did?

JOHN HOLM: That is our last meeting before Christmas?

JERRY PYE: I didn't hear us talk about that, that is on the agenda here next meeting.

THE CHAIR: Yes, we said we would have that meeting on November 15th and it is the last meeting before Christmas and we will have another one in January. Now, we haven't decided on Mr. DeWolfe's statement on that. To me, the vets, you can put them in contact with the veterans or the Legions. There are contacts out there but if it is a problem we could write.

JAMES DEWOLFE: I would suggest it and I liked Mr. Holm's comment that if there is a brochure we can have in our office to hand out or mail out to some of our people, it would be very useful.

THE CHAIR: So what you are suggesting is we write a letter to Veterans Affairs?

JOHN HOLM: Just call the local office of Veterans Affairs to see if they have such a beast and if they do, then ask them to send the committee a bunch and then a couple can be given to each MLA.

JAMES DEWOLFE: Perhaps the clerk could look after that.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Wilson, you had something?

DAVID WILSON: Mr. Chairman, I have an idea that I want to run by everybody and I don't know if it follows under the jurisdiction of this committee or not but I thought that maybe

it would be an idea for this committee to consider. First of all I need some information and I don't know if any of the other caucuses have set up on your Web sites right now that can handle accepting letters of support and that sort of thing for the Armed Forces personnel who are on their way to Afghanistan, or in that area? Is there anything you have set up so far?

JOHN HOLM: I haven't checked our Web site, quite truthfully, but we have got - not lately but . . .

DAVID WILSON: I thought it would be a good idea and I am serious when I say this - a non-partisan idea for this committee - to suggest to Communications Nova Scotia, through the government Web site, the gov.ns.ca, that space be made available on that site for Nova Scotians to send e-mails of support and good wishes to the Armed Forces personnel. I thought it would be a good idea, perhaps from our committee, if we could ask Communications Nova Scotia what other departments are necessary to look into that immediately, so that we could get it set up if it is possible and get it underway.

MARK PARENT: You are making a motion?

DAVID WILSON: I haven't, but I will.

MARK PARENT: Then I will second the motion.

DAVID WILSON: You can't second it before I make it.

MARK PARENT: Well, in a sense you made it that Communications Nova Scotia set up . . .

THE CHAIR: Before you make the motion, the e-mails sent aboard the ships now, they go through the Navy.

DAVID WILSON: Yes, but I think that . . .

MARK PARENT: All you are asking is for something on the government Web site that . . .

DAVID WILSON: Well, I don't know if the Armed Forces personnel can access e-mail while they are onboard ship, I think they can and if so, they can certainly contact ns.gov.ca and go on the government Web site. If there is a section on that government Web site that they can just click on and go to e-mails from home or whatever, anybody who wants to contribute to that, it would be one source they could go to to pick up some of that mail. It gives the general public - their families would have access through the Navy I take it - an idea or chance to put on whatever (Interruptions)

JOHN HOLM: It is a good idea. I think there is a site now - I don't know where it is at

but I remember hearing a news report that there is some site - that people can send e-mails of support. But even if there is one . . .

DAVID WILSON: We could add one.

JOHN HOLM: We could add one and I don't know how . . .

MARK PARENT: Or you can just link . . .

JOHN HOLM: Yes, you can just do the links and I don't know how you can get them distributed but doing the linking process, if the Navy has a site . . .

DAVID WILSON: If there is a site then perhaps we could put a link on the Web site that would link to that site.

JOHN HOLM: . . . and when we find that address or we know what it is, it might be helpful if that was sent to each individual caucus office because then each individual caucus might also, on their own Web site, because sometimes you visit one and not the other, and given an opportunity, so.

DAVID WILSON: My idea is for that to come, again, totally non-partisan from this committee to set things up.

JOHN HOLM: Good idea.

THE CHAIR: Could you wait a minute and then make the motion again.

JERRY PYE: It's a good idea, Mr. Chairman, however I want you to know that on the bases the Parent Resource Centres have access to the ships and have a Web site set up to the ships for the family members so that they can make daily contact, and the general public can go into the Parent Resource Centres to send a message off as well. So the linkage is already made there with respect to sending congratulations off and wishing them good luck and so on.

JOHN HOLM: I think also that the stations on the ships where these computers are, I think they even have those web cams . . .

DAVID WILSON: Yes, and they can do live messages.

JOHN HOLM: . . . because I was told by somebody who sells computers that a hot item has been the sale of the web cams so that they can hook them up to their home computer so they can actually see their loved ones at home when they are talking to them, so they can show the baby, show the family members and the partner who is away can actually see as well as read the e-mails.

DAVID WILSON: Just in case one of the personnel by accident went on the government Web site, you know . . .

JOHN HOLM: You have all kinds of others, not just government, you know.

DAVID WILSON: You get all sorts of enquiries for the Library and contact lists and that and if there is a link there. I don't think it is that much technically or space-wise or anything like that.

JAMES DEWOLFE: This is our computer expert right here. Would you suggest that probably since the link is there that we just utilize that or maybe make sure our members are aware that that can be utilized?

MARK PARENT: I think it is a good idea, symbolically, to put it on the government Web site and just ask the web master to stick it on. He may just do it as a link, he may do it . . .

THE CHAIR: Could we have that motion?

DAVID WILSON: I move that somebody from the Veterans Affairs Committee contact Communications Nova Scotia and look into that linkage being set up to provide the government Web site with a linkage to whatever the case may be, in terms of sending out e-mails to Armed Forces personnel.

MARK PARENT: I second that. And then we can all do it on our own, we can suggest to our own caucuses that it be done.

JOHN HOLM: I was just going to say as a friendly amendment . . .

DAVID WILSON: Let me include that, that we also go to our own caucuses and suggest that be done as well.

JOHN HOLM: I was just going to say that maybe, when Communications Nova Scotia is setting it up, whatever address it is for the link purposes, that could be sent to the individual caucus offices to make it easier for the caucuses to find the links for the connections.

DAVID WILSON: Great.

THE CHAIR: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

MARK PARENT: This is just a matter of interest, it is not an agenda item, but I was given a book to help edit and it is written by Major, the Reverend Kenneth Lawrence Wilmot, who was Chaplain for the West Nova Scotia Regiment, during the last two years of the war. The West Nova Scotia Regiment was the war regiment that had been quartered at Camp Aldershot.

I didn't really realize it, Bill, but Aldershot is the main reservist base for the whole Maritime Provinces and it is quite something. It may well be at some stage that once we are out of the House and people have a bit more time, that we should have a meeting up there. I would be happy to make the arrangement for that, so that you could have a tour of the base. It is right in my own riding and I didn't realize how important it was, it is 'the reservist base' for the whole of Atlantic Canada, so I could probably arrange that and set that up at some stage if you like.

THE CHAIR: That is something we could discuss next spring, maybe. Actually, I just became aware of that a couple of weeks ago, myself.

JAMES DEWOLFE: Can I ask you a question about Aldershot, just out of interest, I get invitations and I suspect all members do, to the dinners down there. Is that the case? I have never been to one but I would like very much to do that.

MARK PARENT: The best thing about being an MLA is going to their dinners, they are superb.

JAMES DEWOLFE: It is just a long drive for some of us to go to one but I continue to get telephone invitations to attend. I must have appeared on a list from this committee back in days gone by. I would like to say that if you need a fill-in for this tour, if you ever do it, I would like to go because my father served with the West Novies during the Second World War and I would very much like to tour the base.

MARK PARENT: Anyway, I would suggest we do that after the spring session.

DAVID WILSON: Well, even if we don't need a fill-in, we will just invite Mr. DeWolfe along, period, whether we need a fill-in or not.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for sharing that information with us and we will discuss that at a future time. Any other business before we adjourn?

JOHN HOLM: Just as a question, nobody else has requested to come in to see us?

THE CHAIR: No, that's it. Actually, during the past couple of years, we have made quite a bit of headway, really. There are just so many things you can do in Veterans Affairs, you know, it is not something where you can go out and bring people in. The Legions are standard,

they like to meet with us every year but other than that, other than getting Bill Gibson and Walter Callow and people like that, there are really not that many people.

Anyway, if that's it, the meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:32 a.m.]