

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Thursday, April 21, 2005

Committee Room 1

Veterans Affairs Canada

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Gerald Sampson (Chair)
William Dooks
William Langille
Cecil O'Donnell
Jerry Pye
Gordon Gosse
David Wilson (Sackville-Cobequid)
Harold Theriault
Stephen McNeil

In Attendance:

Darlene Henry
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Veterans Affairs Canada

John Walker
Regional Director General

Gordon Thomas
Client Services Team Manager, Halifax District Office



HALIFAX, THURSDAY, APRIL 21, 2005

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR
Gerald Sampson

THE CHAIR: Now that we have a quorum, I'll call the meeting to order. We'll start with introductions.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: With that, gentlemen, I will turn the floor over to yourselves for your presentation.

JOHN WALKER: Thanks for having us back. The last time we were here on January 20th, they wouldn't let me come without three other people to help me. I think they were nervous of what I'd commit to or what I'd promise. This time we're down to one, maybe the next time they'll trust me enough to let me come by myself.

First of all, thanks for having us back. It was January 20th we were here the last time and I do believe that we've responded to the questions that we had put to us on January 20th. Before I go into my presentation, I would like to commend the province on the appointment of Mr. Clarke as the Minister responsible for the Year of the Veteran. It's the only province in the country that has done that to date. We have met with Mr. Clarke and Mr. Fowler to see how we can co-operate here in Nova Scotia and what we can get done. I think it looks very good and I think we'll be able to accomplish quite a bit together.

I guess since the last time we were here on January 20th the committee did have the occasion to meet with members of the Royal Canadian Legion on March 3rd. At that meeting there were some concerns brought up about the benefits available under the VIP program. I think the committee members have the material on the Veterans Independence Program and what it entails and the benefits that are available to Nova Scotians.

If my numbers are correct, there are about 13,000 Nova Scotia veterans enrolled in the Veterans Independence Program and its annual expenditure last year was about \$35 million, which gives you a rough expenditure per veteran, if you average it out, of about \$5,500, \$5,600. So I think that program is really well ensconced in Nova Scotia and well received.

I meant to bring with me a paper to show the impact of those types of services on the elderly. Dr. David Pedlar and I have done what I will loosely call a study and we've published it in the Canadian Journal on Aging to show that when you make these programs available to individuals who can remain in their own home, about 90 per cent of the people, even after they're assessed as needing long-term care in a nursing home facility - basically a nursing home - they would prefer to stay in their own home. The cost for the taxpayers is about \$6,000 on average to provide them with the Veterans Independence Program and our treatment program which provides them essentially with drugs and related paraphernalia to enable them to stay home.

I apologize for not bringing it today, but I will make that paper available for the committee if you're interested. It's quite dramatic, the impact, that a relatively small amount of money versus the amount of money that it costs the government and the individual to have somebody in a long-term care facility, it is quite marked. And perhaps most importantly of all, we find the individuals are happier in their own home environment with their family and friends around them than they are going to a nursing home. People do not wish to go into a nursing home.

Prior to coming to the Dartmouth office, I was in Charlottetown as the Director of Residential Care for all the beds across Canada. You know, there are 10,000 beds and it's a \$200 million program, but the beauty of the program is people do not want it until they absolutely need it. I guess we can take some solace in that. That's the VIP issue and if there are any questions on that when we're through, that's no problem, I'd be happy to entertain them.

The other issue to come up was an issue with regard to staffing in Nova Scotia and people in the Sydney office having to travel fairly far afield to - I believe the example was Sheet Harbour. The reason people from Cape Breton are travelling down that far is because we left them the choice of would they prefer to relocate to the Halifax office or stay in the Cape Breton office. They wished to stay in the Cape Breton office. We left that up to them and that's how they chose to deal with it. The coverage is such that there are many more veterans on the mainland, of course, so that's why they have to come down as far as they do to have some equal distribution of work between the two offices.

As far as staff reductions, in Nova Scotia in our two district offices in 2001-02, we had 65.9 full-time equivalents - that's a mix of part-time and full-time - because we don't have, that I know of, the 0.9 of a person out there, so that's spread over several people. Now, 2005-06, this year, we have 65.5 so there's been a 0.4 reduction over four years. In and of itself, that is a reduction, but what the numbers don't tell you is that we have changed the way we do work in district offices.

In our client satisfaction surveys with veterans, 59 per cent of veterans would like to have phone contact, 24 per cent would like to have personal contact. What they did tell us very explicitly was they're not real big on voice mail - press button 1, press button 2 and so on. Not many people like that concept and when you're dealing with an average age of 80, 81, perhaps they like it a little less than the rest of us who perhaps have accepted it and we're used to it.

What we have done, we've established a contact centre in our Dartmouth office with a 1-800 number where any veteran can call into and they do not get voice mail, they get a person who can take their calls and respond to their concerns. I believe at our contact centre we are able to deal with 75 per cent of the calls with their concerns right there. The other 25 per cent would be transferred over to whatever district office it is across Atlantic Canada.

Across the country we took 1 million phone calls a year out of the district offices. So that's a significant amount of work which has been relocated from the district office to the contact centre; there are five of them across the country - sorry, I stand corrected, there are three: one here, one in Winnipeg and one in Vancouver.

The other thing we did was take our treatment program, which is the program with the Blue Cross card with its 14 programs of choice - drugs, hearing aids, glasses, those types of things - and that too is a \$175 million program across the country. We've taken that work and we've moved it into what we call treatment authorization centres; the one for Atlantic Canada is in Newfoundland. The other thing we did to remove work from the district offices here in Nova Scotia was we took veterans' travel and we now provide that service through Blue Cross in Moncton. So all that's to say, the number of staff available for direct services to veterans is, for the most part, the same. They've gone down by 0.4 over five years, but we've changed the way we do our work. So that's, I guess, the message that I wanted to bring in response to the concerns that were raised by the Legion.

The only other issue that I could see that was raised in that meeting of March 3rd, was the issue of the pins. We did order 70,000 pins and the point was raised here that we should find a way to get them directly to the veterans as opposed to giving them - well, I'm just reading from the transcript, so it's not my opinion - to the members of the committee. Just to put that in a context - and the person will remain nameless - the same day I got the transcript and was reading it, I did get a call from a committee member for more pins. I said, well, I can provide more pins, but I don't want to give you a stick to be beaten with. So I said, well, I'll get you more pins.

I guess Veterans Affairs' stance on that is we will give the pins - we know that people will distribute to veterans. There's no reason why Veterans Affairs' staff have to be giving the pins to veterans. To me, personally, it makes more sense for elected people to be giving out pins, regardless of what the level of government is. So that's my two cents' worth on the pins. The pins are gone. We're in the process of ordering more, but I don't know whether we can get them quick enough. That is my official on-the-record response

to the concerns that were raised in the last meeting with the Legion, but often good luck is better than good management.

Yesterday we were very fortunate, if you'll indulge a little bit of a presentation on the announcement that was made yesterday in the House of Commons by our minister, because this is the most significant change in veterans' legislation since 1945. So if we can stop now and I can take questions on what I've said so far and then I could just give you the Cole's Notes version of our new program, so it's up to the Chairman.

THE CHAIR: Any of the committee have questions? Yes, Jerry.

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, through you to Mr. Walker, there's no question that an improvement in services has taken place, once you have recognized that many of the elderly people who are veterans, do not want to do the push-button sort of thing. However there had been, through my office, a couple of individuals we tried to assist through Veterans Affairs by, I believe it's an officer who goes out and visits the individual. I don't know the actual title of that officer.

JOHN WALKER: Area counsellor.

[9:15 a.m.]

JERRY PYE: And the area counsellor goes out and informs the individual on the basic rights that they have through Veterans Affairs. The concern that I have is that it was taking an inordinate amount of time to meet. There would be a date set up and the person would expect the area officer to arrive and it would not happen, and that happens simply because of backlog, it might be storming or whatever, and it's delayed and there's that inordinate amount of time it's delayed in order to bring resolution to their particular cause. Is there a way of addressing that and is there a way of improving on it? I noted that you said there was a 0.9 person there and then you said a 0.4, so I was just wondering if that person shrunk. (Laughter)

JOHN WALKER: It might have been the Atkins diet that was responsible, I'm not sure, for that reduction. What we've done is we have significantly restructured the way we've done work across the country. We're trying to free up the area counsellor and the client service agent with less and less of the "bureaucracy" so that they can deal directly with veterans. Now, like I said, I think our client satisfaction, we're quite happy with them. I'd certainly put them up against any federal department as to how satisfied our clients are.

Are there still improvements that can be made? I'd be a fool to sit here and say there wasn't, because there is, and there will be cases where people don't get things as quickly as they should. What I would suggest is that they phone the 1-800 number and they say look, the area counsellor was supposed to be here at an appointed time, he or she didn't make it, I want to know what's going on. That would be the way I would suggest you deal with it because what the office can do is to simply transfer the call to the district office and they can figure out what went wrong there.

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, thank you so very much, and it's important to note because I think that the services need to be sped up wherever they possibly can, simply because you know the lifespan of certain individuals and the services that they may need are extremely crucial. It might be within a one-month frame that they need those services and it's important that the individuals be there.

Is there a reduction in the number of veterans across the province that then causes Veterans Affairs to reduce the number of staff that will be providing services, or is the same number continuing to be there?

JOHN WALKER: Okay, across the country the numbers are reasonably stable and they have been for the last four or five years. We've pretty much peaked and we've plateaued, and I'll refer to it a little latter on, but yesterday's announcement with regard to the services and benefits that we will be making available for Canadian Forces veterans will actually see our numbers go up until, I believe, the year 2000, and they will start to decline after that. I meant to say 2010, I'm sorry, but after that the number of World War II veterans who make up that segment of our veteran population, will have significantly decreased by then. The "survivors" in other words the widows, will be a significant portion of it, as will the Canadian Forces veterans.

JERRY PYE: Well that's good to hear, and finally, Mr. Chairman, the other point is with respect to the Merchant Marines. They seem to be somewhat lost in the shuffle to some extent that they don't get the level of services and yet they feel that they played a significantly important role in World War II, much the same as all others who have, you know, played that role. Why is it that there seems to be some difficulty with providing some of the service to Merchant Marines? I want to let you know that it's extremely difficult to prove what boat you were on or what ship you were on, and what part of the Atlantic you were on at certain periods of time, yet these are the very questions that Veterans Affairs wants before Merchant Marines even get a step in the door.

JOHN WALKER: Yes, and I guess my comment to that would be, first of all, I agree completely, that it is very difficult to ascertain who was where and who went where on what merchant vessel, that is because the records the Merchant Mariners kept were perhaps not what we would like to have.

JERRY PYE: And sometimes deliberate.

JOHN WALKER: I'm not going to go there. What I can say though is that, I forget what year it was, but we did provide the Merchant Mariners with a significant benefit package. It was within the past four or five years, and they certainly did see an enhanced level of benefits to what they had before, but I think the difficulty you touched on was to determine, now that we have a suite of benefits for them, who's in and who's out and how do we come to that determination. That's the issue whereas before the issue was, there simply were no benefits for them. So they had been recognized and, in fact, last year here at Grand Parade we had the first Merchant Mariners Day and it was a great day actually, lovely weather. So I think we've made progress, but I will acknowledge the difficulties

with determining how we can verify that someone's service is actually what they deem it to be.

JERRY PYE: Thank you, Mr. Walker.

THE CHAIR: John, you keep referring to the 1-800 number, would you like to give the 1-800 number for the benefit of the committee members? Do you have that with you?

JOHN WALKER: It's 1-800-566-2122. We can phone them and see if they answer. (Laughter) That office, it depends which day it is, but Mondays are the busiest. Monday, Monday morning, Tuesday. We'll have upwards of 20 people available to take the calls. Generally we are able to reach 90 per cent of the calls within 45 seconds. That's our benchmark.

THE CHAIR: Does anyone else have any questions, before I ask some questions?

We'll start with Mr. Bill Langille.

WILLIAM LANGILLE: Thank you for coming in this morning. I have a few questions. The veterans, I guess over the past 50 years, they didn't get the recognition that they should have, especially with the federal government, whoever was in power. It's only been lately that they're getting benefits that they should have had years ago, and so on. I think that when it comes to veterans' benefits, and I know we're provincial and we're the only legislative committee in Canada for veterans, and I think part of that is because we have so many veterans in Nova Scotia per population. We have the Eastern Command, of course, of the Canadian Navy stationed here in Halifax. During the war, we had a lot of regiments here in Nova Scotia. Per population, probably served more here. In Manitoba, a lot of them served, but I think here they served more.

As a provincial committee, we can only do so much. I was elected in 1999. When I first got elected, I couldn't believe that the Veterans Affairs Committee was on the bottom of the totem pole, so to speak. It was almost shelved, this committee, years ago. It met once every two years. Since then a lot of good things have happened because of the all-Party agreements. We've done a lot of things here in Nova Scotia, with the Veterans Memorial Highway and the licence plates, the first in Canada. Now everybody has started coming in with the licence plates. And even appointing Cecil Clarke as the Minister of Veterans Affairs, for this year only, of course, the Year of the Veteran.

I've had dealings with Ottawa, written letters and had promises. When you identify a problem, you want to try to fix it. I know it's beyond your realm to be able to do this; however, in Tatamagouche they identified a need for two veterans' beds in the hospital, which was promised by the Minister of Veterans Affairs for Canada. But politics are strange, they play an important role, but even this became lost in the shuffle. I don't know if they ever had any intentions, but the Veterans Affairs Minister seems to change every couple of years, probably more than any other ministry, really. You've probably worked under numerous Ministers of Veterans Affairs.

JOHN WALKER: Quite a few.

WILLIAM LANGILLE: The vets, to me and as a regular member of the Royal Canadian Legion and a staunch supporter of vets, I just don't think that they had the recognition in the past, although they're getting more recognition now, but it's 50 years after, going on 60 years, really, since 1945. I don't understand the reasoning behind that. I know that you can't do anything about that, but you had to have seen the pattern over the years . . .

JOHN WALKER: I can make some comments, because I can draw on almost 25 years of working there. I guess my comment would be this, Veterans Affairs is perhaps the only department that I know of that was given a group of clients back in the late 1940s, when they came back, the World War II guys, and told, okay, here's your group of clients. What we did was we followed them as they aged so that the needs that they had when they were 20, 25, 30 were vastly different than their needs now.

We still had the same set of tools in our toolbox and we had to evolve it over time. So in the early years we concentrated on acute care, getting people trained, getting them with the Veterans Land Administration and stuff like that, getting them re-established back into "civilian life" but as they got older, we didn't have the need for our acute care facilities such as, at the time, Camp Hill. We transferred it to the province. We keep the beds reserved for veterans, but they become long-term care beds.

So we concentrated on re-establishment, disability pensions, income programs, and now health care and pensions are our priority, but about 10 years ago people realized that we had really two main pillars - disability pension and health care - and about 10 years ago it was decided by the minister at the time, you know, that we need a third leg for that stool and the third leg was commemoration. We've had Canada Remembers for 10 years and it has been very successful. It has been very well embraced by the Canadian population. The only thing I can think of, you know, the focus was not on commemoration the way it was since back on the 50th Anniversary. We can't rewrite the way it was done, you know, from 1945 on, but in the last 10 years there has been a significant emphasis in the department to enhance the commemorative aspect role of the department.

WILLIAM LANGILLE: Just one closing comment. One of the best things that I've seen in the last few years is in The Halifax ChronicleHerald where, when veterans pass away, they put the Canada flag there and I look at that on a daily basis and I look at the number of vets, not all of them, but I read a lot of their obituaries and that, in itself, is probably one of the biggest recognitions that those vets have received in their lifetime really and I commend the paper for doing that. I don't know how many others do it across Canada. Are you aware of it?

JOHN WALKER: It is across Canada in several papers, but like you correctly pointed out, it is a relatively recent phenomena and perhaps this is a sad testimony, but maybe it's because we realize that the average age of these people is 80 or 81 and, you know, they're only here for a limited amount of time. So I think that that's an element.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Gosse.

GORDON GOSSE: And again, thank you, Mr. Walker and Mr. Thomas, for coming. It's always a pleasure and we always get some insight on some stuff that we have in our constituency offices, but my colleague, the member for Colchester North, brought up a valid point. Sitting on this committee, I find it an honour and a privilege to sit on this committee and in being the only province - I've always told everybody - and now to have a Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Honourable Cecil Clarke, so I commend the province on that move.

Again, people come into your office with different things and my colleague, the member for Dartmouth North, Mr. Pye, mentioned about a journal for Merchant Marines and I happen to have one here today. You can see it's over 60 years of age and the pages are stamped and falling apart. This would have been Mr. Bill Fernandes actually. Bill passed away last Saturday in Cape Breton but for his family for the last few years there was the constant battle with the Merchant Marines in trying to get benefits.

[9:30 a.m.]

This case here was strange. He wasn't born in Canada, but was born in New Guinea and was British. He sailed on these boats and actually if you looked at his journal, he was a cabin boy in 1944-45 during wartime. When you get into Veterans Affairs and you find out the changes that went by over the years that you were explaining that, on February 28, 1995, only an Allied veteran with formal military service during the war, and who were domiciled in Canada at the time of enlistment in the Allied Forces, can qualify for veterans' benefits.

I was just trying to find out why that was changed in 1995. The minister at that time had made that change, that if you were domiciled in Canada, and here was the man who later moved to Canada in, I think it was, 1956 - I have his passport, also - I'm just trying to figure out what was the sense of Veterans Affairs. He was in the hospital, struggling for his life, and the family was trying to get him into a long-term bed, and it became an issue with the social worker to get him in there. Here are his veterans' papers, and we applied back in this year. He never applied, because he just took sick recently. Like you said, the average age was 79 at the time.

They don't apply for things. It's a different breed of men who come to your office, they're pretty proud and they don't know about things like this, to apply. They were young men when they went overseas, 13, 14, cabin boys, 16, 17 years of age, and worked all their lives in the steel industry or the coal industry, whatever else, and brought their families up. It seems like in the time of need, little changes like that - well I know how devastated this family is.

JOHN WALKER: First of all, the change to include the merchant mariners was as a result of veterans' organizations coming forward with their priorities. We do, in large part, take our "marching orders" from the vet orgs because they know what the best needs

are for their constituents. They would identify their priorities as the top - whatever they would be - and we would act on those that we could within the financial constraints that we had at the time.

That particular change, to the best of my recollection, was as a result of the 1995 program review changes. I think Veterans Affairs has been lucky in the sense that we've never been hit perhaps as hard as some other departments, but we still do get the odd comeuppance in a sense. You have to make decisions based on the best information you have.

GORDON GOSSE: I'm just wondering, he would not know how to appeal, and the family is still wondering what else to do with the case. We buried him two Saturdays ago. I don't know what else the family can do . . .

JOHN WALKER: On that particular case, we can go over that. I'll take it back to the office.

GORDON GOSSE: I'd really appreciate it.

JOHN WALKER: I'll get you an answer and a rationale and I don't know what the answer will be . . .

GORDON GOSSE: I've tried my best. It was a pretty emotional time. When they come into your office and say, well you sit on Veterans Affairs - hopefully I help a little bit. You guys have been pretty forthright with us. Also, I travelled the province just before Christmas, and I was down in Liverpool, and I said earlier there was a gentleman by the name of Walter John Buchanan, who was torpedoed - his name is not John Buchanan, the Premier - (Laughter) This gentleman was in the Merchant Marines and was torpedoed in 1942. The boat he was on was the SS Western Head. He was lost at sea. The family has received his medals in recognition of his service, but do not have closure or really know what happened to the body. No body was ever recovered. Also, no one in the family knows if there are any survivors still living from the SS Western Head.

There's no marker for him in Liverpool. They want some kind of closure. His brothers and others are wondering if there's any way of having closure, if they could have the Last Post Fund put a marker up, even though there was no body.

JOHN WALKER: On that one, I'll get the details on it later, and I'll get a response from the people.

GORDON GOSSE: I thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Mr. McNeil.

STEPHEN MCNEIL: Thank you both for coming in today. You had mentioned earlier in your presentation that you had met with the new Minister of Veterans Affairs,

provincially. I applaud the province for that. When you go to the provincial government Web site and you look under the Year of the Veteran, you're automatically shipped off to the Veterans Affairs Canada Web site.

When you were meeting with the minister, did he give you any indication of what his role will be provincially? Is he just going to be a figurehead, or are they actually going to do something?

JOHN WALKER: The impression I got was that they were serious, and he did have his deputy, Mr. Fowler, with him. I look forward to being partners with them throughout the year. I do believe they have full intentions of some meaningful participation.

STEPHEN MCNEIL: They gave you no indication though of where they're headed?

JOHN WALKER: When we met with them it was the same week he was appointed, in fairness to the minister. I believe they had just finished with the accord for Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador, with the energy deal and that same week he'd been appointed, so we took the opportunity to come over and introduce ourselves, so it was in the early days. He was very interested, we talked for over an hour and a half, and I didn't feel we were being rushed in any sense and I sensed a genuine interest.

THE CHAIR: John, just one note for myself. I have a resident, a veteran, who informed me he can get help under the VIP program for a neighbour or a person in the community but, because his son lives with him, he is having difficulty.

I must mention for the record that Joe MacNeil down in Sydney does a heck of a job for us and it's turned over to Joe, but the gentleman, when he phoned me asked, why will they allow me to pay a neighbour or a stranger when I have a family member living in the home with me. He said, I want to stay in my home and I'm used to my son, I don't want some strange person coming in, one of the neighbours, who is going to be involved with personal care for him and whatnot. These people are - to coin a phrase - fiercely independent and that's why they remain in their homes as long as they do. Is there any flexibility in the program to allow for a relative?

JOHN WALKER: The premise that we undertook was there is an onus on family members to a certain extent to help with - in this case - parents. In most cases it would be parents. I hesitate to say whether or not we could make exceptions - once you start that, it's a slippery slope to start down. There are certain aspects of it, in this case the son may or may not be qualified to do. If he wasn't we could look into it. But for things like shovelling the snow, cutting the grass - those types of things - we would expect that an able-bodied son would be doing that for his parents. It is one of the underpinnings of the program, that family members do have some responsibility to assist their parents to stay in their own home. Have you turned the case over to Joe?

THE CHAIR: Yes. It's a Mr. Harvey down in Ingonish. He's quite elderly but as he said, at his age he doesn't want some lady from the neighbourhood coming in, or a stranger he would be uncomfortable with, whereas if it's his son who can help him around the house or help him in or out of the shower he would feel more comfortable. I was just looking for flexibility in the policy.

JOHN WALKER: As a general rule, we don't do it. But if anyone can find a way to do it, I'm confident Mr. MacNeil can. I will follow up with Joe to see what the particulars are and make sure he provides an answer one way or the other.

I do want to emphasize that is one of the underpinnings of the program - there is some responsibility with family members.

THE CHAIR: Harold Theriault.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Thank you for the presentation this morning. I'm sorry I missed the first of it.

JOHN WALKER: Oh, the first was the best.

HAROLD THERIAULT: I'll read it in Hansard. I guess, John, the last time I was at one of these meetings when you were here was a couple of months ago. I missed the last meeting where SOCAN was brought up again. I brought it up to you a couple of months ago. I've heard that non-profit groups such as Legions could apply under Tariff 21 to not have to pay these monies to SOCAN. Can you fill us in on any of that?

JOHN WALKER: I do not have an update. The last I was told was that there was little or nothing that the federal government or Veterans Affairs could do to alleviate those payments to SOCAN on behalf of the Legion but whether or not there were agencies outside of government that could find a way to help, that may well be, but we didn't have the jurisdiction to get in there. That's what they've advised me. Now, I will provide an update to the committee of where that is right now. I should have brought one with me, but I didn't.

HAROLD THERIAULT: So you do have an update?

JOHN WALKER: I will provide you with an update as to where it is right now, but it's not something that we're directly involved in.

HAROLD THERIAULT: So the Legions have applied?

JOHN WALKER: I believe they have.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Where do they apply through? Maybe I'll wait for the update.

JOHN WALKER: Okay, I will get you an update because I hesitate to provide information that I may have to retract. I've learned that over the years.

HAROLD THERIAULT: Okay, thank you.

THE CHAIR: No other questions? Yes, okay, Mr. Langille.

WILLIAM LANGILLE: My final question is in regard to headstones for vets. In Canada in this day and age I really find it hard to believe that the government, past and present, does not supply headstones for our veterans. I mean some of our veterans are desolate and go to graves with unmarked headstones, and I look in my area and I see a bunch of school kids raising money to get a headstone for a veteran who died, you know, and I know it's a society and I know that the federal government allocates x number of dollars, which really is not very much in the Province of Nova Scotia when you look at across Canada for the headstones. I know that you don't have any control over this. However, I really believe that the government in power should at least supply headstones for our vets.

JOHN WALKER: And we do have a departmental program and a program available through the Last Post Fund.

WILLIAM LANGILLE: And I realize that it is through the Last Post Fund.

JOHN WALKER: Well, there are some occasions where we can have a departmental headstone, but at the end of the day there should not be unmarked veterans' graves because the mandate and the role of the Last Post Fund is to make sure there are no unmarked veterans' graves.

WILLIAM LANGILLE: And I realize that is the role; however, there just aren't enough funds allocated for the Last Post Fund to ensure that all the graves are marked and that's why we have school kids raising money to get a marked grave.

JOHN WALKER: But I think that the Last Post Fund, they have not expended all the money that has been allocated to them over the years, because I remember there was a significant, and I'm searching for a word to describe - at this committee two years ago it was brought up and there was a significant amount of discussion over this very topic. I believe that it has been straightened out and the Last Post Fund does have a significant amount of money available at their disposal. So I think that that has been resolved and I might say that bringing that to light at this committee did go a long, long way to clarifying the situation and, indeed, I believe it created a windfall for the Last Post Fund as to how much money they have available.

WILLIAM LANGILLE: But that's exactly my point, it shouldn't have to come to this committee. The government should have allocated enough money for the Last Post Fund in order to cover the grave markers for our veterans. Anyway, I appreciate what you're

saying, but I don't think you have to bring it into the public eye in order to correct a wrong through the media. It should be corrected before this.

JOHN WALKER: I have to be careful, because I wasn't here, but my understanding was the Last Post Fund did have enough money in their allocation. They hadn't expended it all.

WILLIAM LANGILLE: I don't have the figures with me today.

JOHN WALKER: Nor do I.

WILLIAM LANGILLE: But I know that it was in the low thousands, \$5,000 or whatever, allocated in Nova Scotia for grave markers and I give the school kids high marks for raising money to provide a headstone for our vets, but in a nation like Canada, it shouldn't have to be that way and if you're saying, today, that we have enough money in the Last Post Fund to cover all the graves, that's fine.

[9:45 a.m.]

JOHN WALKER: Yes, that's my understanding.

WILLIAM LANGILLE: And I appreciate that, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Wilson has a question.

DAVID WILSON: Just a comment on Mr. Langille's information. I agree totally with the member. When I first became aware of the situation in Nova Scotia, we did bring it up here and Veterans Affairs wasn't aware of the backlog that we had in the province. Recently, I was in contact with the Last Post Fund and they did address quite a few numbers last Summer and are hoping to address the remaining numbers this Summer. Definitely, I will keep the members of this committee informed of what is happening and hopefully all veterans in this province will have proper markers by the end of the Summer.

Just to clarify, the Last Post Fund money allocated throughout the province is about \$100,000 and the Nova Scotia chapter gets about \$5,000 of that, so definitely, I'll keep you in contact with that. Hopefully, by the end of this Summer they said they should have that totally covered.

JOHN WALKER: My understanding is they were up to date last Summer and then there will be markers accumulating over the Winter months. They have assured me that they're much more on top of it than they were and they're feeling very comfortable.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Before you give us the presentation of what went on yesterday in Ottawa, I would just like to take this opportunity to ask Mr. Thomas if there is anything he would like to add to the meeting before we move on?

GORDON THOMAS: No, that's fine.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Walker, you can proceed.

JOHN WALKER: This has been a long time coming. As I described earlier, our programs were predominantly for elderly veterans. World War I veterans now, at last count we had perhaps five remaining in Canada. Just over the Christmas holidays, the last female World War I veteran, Mrs. Strike, passed away at Camp Hill, so I believe there are five remaining across Canada.

The bulk of our population now for the elderly veterans is the World War II veterans and our programs are geared towards, essentially, an elderly male population. In order to get access to our programs, you had to have had a disability pension, or have low income, essentially, those were the gateways through which you were able to get into our programs.

What we found was that with our Canadian Forces veterans, we had a program where the only way they could get more from us was to prove that they were "sicker" than they were before. All the health care programs across the country now are based on a wellness model, to help people to get better to reintegrate back into society. Well, we found ourselves with the very opposite to that. People had to prove they were more sick before they could get more money from us to get a pension, or to get into our health care programs, so it wasn't working for them. While they were well, we were well-positioned for the World War II veteran, the program was not working for the Canadian Forces veterans.

These people are, on average, age 39, on release from the Forces, and at 39 years old you have a lot of productive years ahead of you. What we found was we needed programs to enable these people to reintegrate back into society and have a meaningful role, get a job, those types of things. What we've come up with is a program which takes the Veterans Charter from the late 1940s and puts it into today's terms. I'll just read from the press release that the deputy minister put out yesterday.

It says: The minister unveiled legislation today to help Canada's CF veterans reintegrate into civilian life upon completion of duty. The face of Canada's veterans is changing, and the programs and services designed to support them will change with them. The new Veterans Charter is a result of the continuing effort by Veterans Affairs Canada and National Defence to work together to provide CF members with an improved quality of life. The new legislation represents a comprehensive wellness package of services and programs designed to ensure Canadian Forces members and their families get the best opportunity for a successful transition to productive civilian life.

This package will offer the following key elements to support wellness: rehabilitation services - now, rehabilitation services, that's to enable people to stabilize their medical conditions and then have training and education in order to help them reintegrate into the workplace. The health benefits program will be much more like the civil service benefits that are available through the Public Service Health Plan, which were not available to the extent that they should have been available before.

We're going to have a job placement package, which means once the person has gone through the rehab process and they're ready, they're retrained and they're ready for work, we will have a contract with an outside agency to work with that person to actually find them a job. There will be an economic loss program that will provide them with financial assistance while they're undergoing their rehab program, and at a point in time they find that they cannot work, there will be an income security program available for them.

One of the other features, if the member is not able to partake in the rehab program, the program will be made available for their spouse, should they wish to undertake it. There's much more of a concentration here on family, treating the family as a unit as opposed to our programs before which were designed specifically for the veteran. We really excluded the family members.

Another change is that there'll be a disability award. Now this is a significant change because before, people would get a monthly pension tax-free for life. This change will see a change whereby an award will be given to the person, up to \$250,000 for 100 per cent pension, a one-time payment. It's in increments of 10 per cent: for 10 per cent disability pension, you will now get \$25,000; 20 per cent, you would get \$50,000. But you would have access to all these other benefits, which were not in place before.

It's a significant change. I do have the presentation here. What was behind it was that we found that the peacekeeping roles that we've had pre-1990, those peacekeeping roles have changed significantly. We've moved away from peacekeeping to peacemaking. Peacemaking, it's not unlike war. Before you'd go in and the two sides - peace would have been there, each side was on their own side of whatever imaginary line. Now in the deployments they're finding there is no imaginary line. They go to places like Rwanda, and there's no end to what they can find themselves in, and they're very much warlike. We've found that that's a significant difference.

There are 83 per cent of CF veterans indicating that they have chronic pain. For the Canadian population, it's 5 per cent. Another 28 per cent report depression. They're just seeing themselves in a much more pressurized situation than they had pre-1990. It was affecting family life. They'd come back and the post-traumatic stress disorder is something that's really much more prevalent in today's CF veterans than it has been in the past.

What we looked at was a way we could take new programs to address what we are seeing as new needs, because before the only way they could get in through our program was to say, okay, I have a disability pension and a lot of people's goal was to get to 100 per cent disabled because that would mean they would get the maximum pension cheque every month. So there was disincentive for wellness. There wasn't an emphasis on the family that there will be now. So those are the types of things that we're looking at. The legislation was just introduced yesterday. We are busily writing the regulations and the policies to go with it, and it's expected that if all goes according to plan, which it may or may not, that by April 2006, these new benefits will be available for the CF veterans.

THE CHAIR: John, can I just ask you for a point of clarification? If a person qualifies under a certain percentage of disability and are granted that financial reward that you stated, they do not then continue to have a pension? It's a one-time deal, you get your bundle of money and that's it?

JOHN WALKER: They get the bundle of money and that's it, but there's also an economic loss program, which if at the end of the day we put you through all the rehab and we pay you 75 per cent of your salary during two years of rehab or however long it takes to get you to the point where you can re-enter the job market, that's our goal here, and we think that the vast majority of people will be able to do that. So there are the two aspects. There's the disability award which is a monetary reimbursement for the pain, suffering, et cetera, that you're going to have for life because of that injury, but also there's an economic security net which will make sure you have day-to-day monies to live on, but, the vast majority will be reintegrated into the workplace.

THE CHAIR: Is there any monitoring of that program set up? Because what I'm thinking of is if someone qualifies for \$50,000 or \$100,000 and are suffering post-traumatic stress syndrome or are in some way mentally incapacitated, they would be ripe for the picking that somebody could just say, look, do this with this \$75,000 you got, or do this with this \$50,000 and bang, it's gone overnight. They've had it today and it's gone tomorrow and now they're left totally distraught with no source of income.

JOHN WALKER: Two things. They will have a source of income because of the economic loss, that safety net is there. There will not be anybody without a source of income. Our first hope is that they'll be able to acquire a job through this rehab program, reintegrating them back into society. Okay, that's the first one. For those who don't make it or they can't, then there will be the economic capacity there to provide them with economic payments. So that is there.

With regard to if somebody gets \$75,000 or \$150,000 - this is literally right off the press yesterday and it is being developed as we speak and it will be developed over the next year - we will have to come up with a way where if the doctor feels that this person is at risk, we will provide them with financial counselling, make those services available to them. But if it's really a situation where the person has demonstrated that they are not capable of dealing with it, to provide a power of attorney for that individual is always an option. It's a tricky area we're getting into there, and we'll have to treat each case individually because some people might not wish to ascribe to a power of attorney and we can only do so much.

I think I would be nervous if we didn't have the economic loss program available for them, because they could take that amount of money and it would gone and then theoretically they could be on the street. But with the economic loss program that's available, we feel we've provided for that type of situation.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, John. Mr. Pye has a question.

JERRY PYE: I was just listening intently to the rehab program and the economic loss, and I hope that this is not comparable to what is called the voc rehab through workers' compensation. I hope that is not what you're saying, but yet I get that kind of an impression, that it is.

[10:00 a.m.]

JOHN WALKER: Well, I'm not familiar with the program you're referring to. We will have, the rehab program has . . .

JERRY PYE: Can I interrupt here?

JOHN WALKER: Yes, you can.

JERRY PYE: You mentioned the economic loss, so that's a measurement, right? And it's a measurement of the potential loss of revenue or income that an individual will have received over a period of time. That economic loss of dollars flows through with them forever, does it?

JOHN WALKER: Yes. To age 65.

JERRY PYE: That would offset the normal cost because under the vocational rehab through workers' compensation, as I understand it, there's no guarantee to have an individual receive the kind of salary that they had received prior to, but they can actually receive a lesser salary.

JOHN WALKER: Yes.

JERRY PYE: Then it takes the onus of responsibility off government and/or the agency.

JOHN WALKER: Our intention would be they would have at a minimum 75 per cent. We do have the capacity to top up to the 75 per cent. Should they get an employment which is less than they would have had to reach the 75 per cent mark, we do have the capacity to top up. The program has taken a long time to put together. It is evolving as we speak. There's always a danger of coming and presenting to you something that is a work in progress so I'm presenting our intent. If I went through this whole presentation and provided you with the details, I suspect that next year when we come back or whenever we're back again, there will be modifications to it. It's not something that I suspect we have spot-on on the first pass, but I will tell you that the tools we've made available for the people in the district offices to address the needs of the Canadian Forces veterans will be much, much better than they were before we had these.

JERRY PYE: This applies solely to CFVs who have retired and who have a disability?

JOHN WALKER: Yes. Medically released or people who have what we're calling a service-related rehabilitation need. That means there's something that has happened during their service that has affected their ability to reintegrate to society.

JERRY PYE: Application will be able to be made next year, 2006, hopefully?

JOHN WALKER: Yes, that is our intent. Now, there's one other thing which I didn't mention, but I really should. Before the CF veterans could get any benefits through Veterans Affairs, they had to have a disability pension and the disability pension process is not really the quickest process that we have. It's six, eight, nine months. So in that period of time, currently, that person has no benefits from us. But what we've done is disentangled the disability award process from the ability to access the other programs. Once they come in and they're medically released or they have a service rehabilitation need, bingo, bango, bongo, you're in. The disability award can go down a separate track. That's a significant change.

JERRY PYE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, John. Do you have a question, Gordie?

GORDON GOSSE: Actually, I wanted to make a motion before we adjourn. We're not adjourning right now, are we? We're going to do some committee business. I don't know if I make the motion in front of our guests or not. (Interruption) No.

THE CHAIR: Well, all right, we'll wait and do the committee business. We'll thank the gentlemen for coming - John Walker and Gordon Thomas - and for the informative presentation, and look forward to the program evolving and therefore more updates in the future. On behalf of the committee, a warm thank you for your presentation.

JOHN WALKER: Thanks. Any time you want us to come back, it only costs \$2 to come across on the ferry.

THE CHAIR: Well, you could probably give a couple of pins to the captain and get across for free when you're delivering more pins to the committee here.

JOHN WALKER: If I had any.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

[10:07 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:08 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: We'll reconvene the meeting for committee business now. We'll proceed with the remainder of the members who are here. The letter that went out, as of our last meeting, we sent a letter to the Honourable Angus MacIsaac, and the response came back. Everyone received the response. It states at the bottom that the department is

interested in exploring how these services can be improved and augmented with other supports. What we didn't do was cc this to the Legion, not all the Legions, but to the district command. With the permission of the committee, I think we should cc this letter to the district command with a note attached so that, if they so desire, it would be our request that they cc it to the Legions around the province to show the activity of the committee. Is it agreed?

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, if you don't mind, I wouldn't go so far as to phrase it, if they so desire. I would go so far as to phrase it to say, it would be our hope that you would forward our correspondence to the Legions, rather than saying if you so desire, if you don't mind. We have toured Nova Scotia from time to time, and Legion members have informed us that they'd not heard anything about such a thing coming before the committee.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to put that in the form of a motion then, Mr. Pye?

JERRY PYE: I don't think it needs to be in the form of a motion. It's a tidy thing, it really doesn't need to be in the form of a motion.

THE CHAIR: Then that's what we'll include.

Is that agreed upon by consensus?

It is agreed.

The only other item that I have here was brought to my attention by the MLA for Glace Bay, that if a person is in possession of a veteran licence plate, then they can't have a disabled plate. As Mr. Pye stated, you could have the veteran plate and then you have the disabled sticker on the windshield or something. Maybe somebody has some information on that.

WILLIAM LANGILLE: Well, having been a police officer for 30 years, you can only display one licence plate on a vehicle. So I think the choice is yours, either have your vet's or have your disabled. In Nova Scotia we don't have a front plate. To display one in the back and one in the front would be illegal.

THE CHAIR: No, I think what he was getting at was the possibility of a veteran plate with a disabled logo on the plate. But that would mean producing a totally separate plate. Maybe for clarification a letter to Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Affairs, on how they would handle that.

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, if I may, I just wanted to use my own example. First of all, the honourable member for Colchester North indicates that you cannot use two different licence plates on a vehicle. That is inaccurate in the sense that you can have a disabled flashing sticker on the front of your car and yet have a civilian licence plate on the back. There's only one plate required on your car in Nova Scotia, and that's a rear plate. There's no requirement for a plate on the front. I display a disabled sticker on the front of

my car while using a civilian licence, if you want to call it civilian, or a regular licence plate, which is the appropriate term, a regular licence plate on the back of my automobile. Now, I've been frequently stopped by many people in the policing services, not for any irregularities now, mind you, for the record. (Laughter)

THE CHAIR: We know Mr. Pye is pure.

JERRY PYE: Not pure, but by the same token, they have never indicated that in fact I was in violation of any provincial law with respect to plates and you will see it consistently across the province and in parking lots and so on where in fact the disabled sticker is in the front and it means that that disabled sticker is transportable. It can go from one vehicle to another that you might be driving. So that is why I brought it to the attention of the Chairman earlier, is that in fact the disabled sticker might be a way out - not that it's the way in which this needs to be addressed because if you want a cumbersome licence plate with a disabled logo on it as well as a veteran licence, then it makes a mess of the whole plate and that's only from my vantage point because as I see the plate now, it requires a Canada flag and a number and it says "Veteran".

JOHN WALKER: Yes.

JERRY PYE: If you were to require a Canada flag, a disabled logo and the numbers, you're getting it to be somewhat cumbersome.

WILLIAM LANGILLE: We would have licence plates like in Europe.

JERRY PYE: So I just wanted to bring that to the Chairman's attention earlier and I think the response from Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations might be that in fact there are transportable, disabled stickers that are displayed on the front of your windshield that will accommodate the veteran who has a disability as well.

WILLIAM LANGILLE: And just to clarify what I said, I was inaccurate. What I said was you're only allowed one licence plate, I'm not talking about a sticker, Mr. Pye, I'm talking about a licence plate. You cannot display two licence plates, that's what I said. You can display a sticker on the front of your vehicle, or the windshield, whatever, but you cannot have two licence plates. Just for clarification, that's where I'm coming from and that's under the Highway Traffic Act.

THE CHAIR: So would it be appropriate then that we ask the secretary to just send a letter off to Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations requesting some clarification for that?

WILLIAM LANGILLE: Well, I believe it's pretty clear right now what the law is, but whatever Mr. Pye wants to recommend, I don't have a problem with that.

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, I agree. I think there has been a request that the Veterans Affairs Committee contact Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations with

respect to what they see as an irregularity. So we would send them off a letter asking them to comment on the concern that was brought forward and I would so move.

THE CHAIR: Moved by Mr. Pye and seconded by Stephen McNeil. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

So we'll send that letter off for clarification.

Is there any further business to come before the committee? Mr. Gosse, you had something?

[10:15 a.m.]

GORDON GOSSE: Yes, I requested earlier that I would like to make a motion in front of this committee. Whereas the year 2005 is the Year of the Veteran, you know, where communities all across Nova Scotia should be encouraged to get together and put on their own events to celebrate and honour our local veterans. Whereas finding funding for this may be difficult for some groups and that the Nova Scotia Government set up the Year of the Veteran assistance fund, I think, to complement the federal grants program to help local communities honour their veterans and we do have a minister now, as I stated earlier in the meeting, Mr. Cecil Clarke.

I was wanting to make a motion that we have a Year of the Veteran assistance fund set up and start with a minimum of a \$60,000 investment to mark the 60th Anniversary of the end of World War II. So non-profit organizations like the Boys and Girls Clubs, Girl Guides, and these guys, can apply or schools can apply for a small grant or something to help with the Year of the Veteran, you know, and I think we've done a lot for veterans here.

JERRY PYE: I will second the motion, Mr. Chairman, and the motion simply is to recognize veterans, and agencies and organizations out in the community that may want to recognize them but don't have the funds themselves. All we're asking is the Minister of Veterans Affairs in the Year of the Veteran set a small amount of money aside, approximately \$60,000, to help agencies and organizations throughout the province that might very well want to partake in this.

Now, we can pass the resolution here and pass it on to the minister, but the minister will then indicate whether there's money available to do it or not. He can certainly send it back to us, telling us if the money's available. But it's not for us to speculate that he doesn't have the dollars to do it.

WILLIAM DOOKS: Mr. Chairman, if I may speak. I was going to just make some comment on the member's comments. Maybe it would be more appropriate to send a letter to the minister, asking the minister if funds are available, because to make a motion, I don't think it's the mandate of this committee to allocate funding anywhere. So it's a new

initiative. Maybe a request, in the spirit of your motion - it's an excellent motion, but I think we should handle it appropriately and send a letter off to the minister to see if there's funding or if he can make the funding available in some spirit like that, which is in line with what you're saying, but a little different.

HAROLD THERIAULT: I don't think \$60,000 - there's going to be a lot of community people running short of money. I don't think it's our place to set this. I agree, we should ask if there could be a fund set up, because we could be talking millions here. (Interruptions) But \$60,000 isn't going to go far. Somebody's going to get left out. I think we should ask for that.

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, I was going to wait until some others had had further comment on this, but I want to say that it's not uncommon for the committee to make recommendations that require dollars. We have done that before. We have made resolutions in committees that have required the government to spend money. The government has always responded to us, telling us we didn't have the resources and we don't have the resources, and we like your idea but it's impossible to implement. They can always tell us that. That doesn't detract from this motion.

The reason why there was a specific number of \$60,000 set aside was that this is the 60th Anniversary, and \$1,000 for each anniversary was something that we thought would be within the means of government, that government could live with, and government could allocate that to the organizations. It didn't have to be \$1,000, it might be \$200 or it might be \$50 or it might be \$1,000, across the province to those agencies and organizations that want to participate. It might be your local chamber of commerce, it might be a board of trade, it might be the Boys and Girls Club, it might be the Kinsmen, the Kiwanis, the Lions, it might be any of those that have other dollars to pony up to the venture. It's not a matter of requirement.

HAROLD THERIAULT: A dollar each?

JERRY PYE: Well, the thing is it's not a requirement. Finally, Mr. Chairman, just to wrap up and to summarize, it's an initiative to provoke something, that's what this resolution does. It provokes a movement, and that's all it does. Everyone else can follow through. To imply that we don't have the authority, we do under the committee's reports have the power and the authority to do exactly what we're doing here now, to craft resolutions.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Dooks.

WILLIAM DOOKS: Once again, Mr. Chairman, I applaud the spirit of the motion, but I would ask simply that a letter of request from this committee go to the minister. There would have to be a program set up, there would have to be people allocated within the department to review criteria. You might as well say it's May now. Basically, as I said, I enjoyed the spirit of the motion, and we should go to the department and ask for comment

to come back from the minister rather than to set any amount of money; \$60,000 is a small amount.

At 60 organizations, \$1,000 each, there's going to be 60 organizations that are going to be upset that they're not able to get the funding. People have to review the applications. It's a red tape nightmare that's going to take place. The spirit is excellent. Let's ask the minister, is there a possibility? I ask the members to agree with that.

THE CHAIR: Mr. McNeil.

STEPHEN MCNEIL: There's a motion on the floor. I just need to know, are you going to amend that, are you going to leave it there, are we going to vote on it?

GORDON GOSSE: I'm going to leave it there.

THE CHAIR: Are you ready for the question? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

I think we better have a show of hands. Would all those in favour raise your hands. Is this motion passed or defeated? I'm asking for a show of hands.

JERRY PYE: The motion is defeated, obviously. But there is something else that will come to the floor, but before we go there Mr. Chairman, on a point of order. I want to have us receive a copy of any committee policy that tells us this resolution we put forward today is out of the bounds of the jurisdiction of the committee.

THE CHAIR: Just for clarity, Mr. Pye?

JERRY PYE: Just for clarity.

THE CHAIR: Actually, it wasn't a resolution, it was read in the form of a resolution, but then Mr. Gosse made a motion requesting the funds. (Interruptions)

WILLIAM DOOKS: That had nothing to do with the motion, but for your own information.

JERRY PYE: No, for all of our information.

WILLIAM DOOKS: Just for an information item.

THE CHAIR: The motion is defeated.

Is there any further business before the committee? Does somebody want to make something further or are we satisfied that the motion is defeated and there's no letter going off?

STEPHEN MCNEIL: I think - and I don't know if whether you need it in the form of a motion - there should be a letter going to the new minister.

JERRY PYE: You do it and I'll second it.

STEPHEN MCNEIL: In the spirit of the motion that was put forward, there should be a letter going to the new Minister of Veterans Affairs in Nova Scotia requesting they look into setting up that program.

WILLIAM DOOKS: With the possibility of setting up some program that would allocate funding for special interest groups who would want to honour the Year of the Veteran. I think that's the way it should be worded.

JERRY PYE: I second it.

HAROLD THERIAULT: I don't believe we can set a figure on that.

THE CHAIR: No. So we have a letter of request moved by Mr. McNeil, seconded by Jerry Pye, to go to the Minister of Veterans Affairs requesting the possibility of setting up a program. I think it should be done ASAP. It's the Year of the Veteran and we're coming to the end of April.

WILLIAM DOOKS: That will be enough for him to respond.

THE CHAIR: So that's a motion that you've made? Are we ready to vote on that? Is there any further discussion on the motion?

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

The motion is carried.

Again, Mr. McNeil.

STEPHEN MCNEIL: Considering this is the Year of the Veteran, I would think it would be incumbent on all of us here who are of different Parties to go back to our House Leaders and encourage them to call forward the bill that is presently before the House, making November 11th a statutory holiday. I would put that on the floor, not as a motion, but just as a request, as a Nova Scotian. We're talking about this being the year of honouring the veterans and we cannot even honour them by making November 11th a statutory holiday. Depending on where you're at in this province, some are working and some aren't. It's hit and miss. In my view, there would be no better way to do that, so I would just like to put that on the floor.

WILLIAM LANGILLE: You don't know much about vets.

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, just to go back for clarity. I want to have clarity on this. The motion by the honourable member for Cape Breton Nova, the motion that was

defeated today at the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I want clarity on what section of the committee that it violated.

THE CHAIR: There was no section violated, I don't believe.

WILLIAM DOOKS: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman. The good member simply made a motion. It was discussed and debated and defeated. It wasn't defeated on the grounds that it was in violation of the mandate of this committee, it was defeated because some members had some concerns about the intent of the motion and the possibility of not being able to move forward at all. We then changed the motion in a very positive spirit to ask the minister if there would possibly be some monies that we could possibly allocate to groups and organizations. I take offence for this to say this motion was defeated on the grounds that it violated the mandate of this committee. I said, I don't know if this committee has the mandate to do it. That's a comment but wasn't a part of defeating that motion.

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, on a point of order as well, there had been a comment made that it violated committee policy, or that it didn't fit committee policy. Whether we've made the change for the good or not is not what I'm questioning. I'm questioning what it violated with respect to committee rules. That's all I'm asking and I want . . .

WILLIAM DOOKS: Mr. Chairman, just one more . . .

THE CHAIR: I think what I'll do is step in here and halt debate on this right now. We'll ask for clarity and maybe through our secretary you could ask for clarity on this, but I really believe that, chairing this meeting, a motion was made and seconded, discussed and defeated, and then we moved on to the next motion. What comments were made in the discussion, I don't think anybody had any intent to - it wasn't defeated because it wasn't the mandate, or whatever, and at this time I think we'll move on to new business. Mr. Wilson.

DAVID WILSON: In light of the government announcing the new Minister of Veterans Affairs for the province, I make a motion that we ask the new minister to appear before the committee just to give us an outline of what he plans to do over the next year, or especially over the next several months.

HAROLD THERIAULT: I'll second that.

THE CHAIR: Moved by Mr. Wilson and seconded by Mr. Theriault that we request the Minister of Veterans Affairs to appear before the committee as a witness as early as the next meeting? Is that in agreement? (Interruption) Or as soon as he's . . .

WILLIAM LANGILLE: Before November 11th. (Interruptions)

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

The motion is carried.

Mr. Gosse.

GORDON GOSSE: Just one more thing. I know during the debate, or whatever else, motions and everything else, that it was said this is April already. Well, the Year of the Veteran doesn't end until January 1, 2006. So we still have lots of time as a committee to plan things and do things to honour our veterans. So I think that we should get together and look at doing something positive as a committee, or something else, to honour our veterans in this province. We still have eight months left.

THE CHAIR: Yes, I know. All I was pointing out is that four months are pretty well gone and if we're going to do something, let's do it. Yes, Mr. Dooks.

WILLIAM DOOKS: Mr. Chairman, it's a very sensitive issue and I want to make it clear that some of the comments that are being talked about, that I had made, as the member for Eastern Shore, what I'm saying was I agreed with the spirit of the motion, but what I was just simply trying to do was create an atmosphere in that we would have a positive response back from the minister. In stating that it is April already, realizing government and government departments when they sit down to build criteria around programs, it can take (Interruption) Mr. Chairman, please, let me finish. (Interruptions)

THE CHAIR: I think that's enough. Let's not leave on a hostile note.

WILLIAM DOOKS: I certainly for the record, Mr. Chairman, can say this. I want to make sure that my comments have been made and that no one is taking away what I said or the intent of my conversation in this committee.

THE CHAIR: You're quite aware that everything is recorded in Hansard and what you said previously, and what you said now, is duly recorded and with that I will cease discussion on that. Is there any further business to come before the committee? Then a motion to adjourn is in order.

STEPHEN MCNEIL: I so move.

THE CHAIR: We stand adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:30 a.m.]