

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Thursday, March 23, 2006

Committee Room 1

Year of the Veteran

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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

[Dr. John Hamm was replaced by Peter Christie.]

In Attendance:

Darlene Henry
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Year of the Veteran

Bob Fowler
Deputy Minister, Intergovernmental Affairs

Colleen MacDonald
Chief of Protocol

Norma MacIsaac
Strategic Communications and Policy



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2006

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Gerald Sampson

THE CHAIR: The appointed hour has arrived, 9:00 a.m., and I think we should call the meeting to order. In doing so we'll welcome Mr. Bob Fowler, Deputy Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs; Ms. Colleen MacDonald, Chief of Protocol; and Ms. Norma MacIsaac, Strategic Communications and Policy. We're here for the Year of the Veteran presentation from the Deputy Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. Having said that, Bob, what we'll do is have a round-table introduction. For the record, I'd like to welcome Mr. Peter Christie, who is substituting for Dr. John Hamm this morning on the committee. I believe it's the first time I've had the pleasure of having a former Minister of Finance as a member of the committee. Maybe we'll continue with the introductions.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: With that, we'll turn it over to yourself, Bob.

BOB FOWLER: Mr. Chairman, members, it's our pleasure to be here today. I feel, in fact I know, I'm going to talk about a subject that you folks around the table know better than I do. You do represent, as I understand today, the only Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs of a Legislature in Canada - when I appeared last Spring, you were the only one and as I understand it you still are today. So, in terms of Nova Scotia's decision through the Legislature to have a Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, I think it speaks volumes of the history and the importance we have always placed on veterans. I had a chance before the meeting to discuss that a little bit with some members.

If I was to sum up the Year of the Veteran from the engagement of staff, it was an absolute pleasure for us. I can't think of an initiative, over a period of a year, where I heard so many, if you would indulge me a bit, non-partisan accolades about a program. My belief is what Nova Scotia did by being the first and only province in Canada that took the lead

from Canada and announced a Minister responsible for the Year of the Veteran, Hon. Cecil Clarke. We created the focus on the veteran, not on the government. That's a tremendous attribute to each of you and your colleagues in the Legislature, and all the people who volunteered their time to make the Year of the Veteran a tremendous success.

I want to start by saying that the way we approached the Year of the Veteran was we took our lead from Canada. It was obviously the federal Parliament and government that made the decision to declare 2005 as the Year of the Veteran. We were very mindful that this was a Canada-wide celebration in recognition, and we wanted to complement that, not to blow our own horn but to complement that. I would hope you would all agree that's how the year turned out, that it was supportive of what Canada did. I can tell you that the federal minister has recognized Nova Scotia for its dedication of the Year of the Veteran and the appointment of a minister responsible. There have been numerous verbal and/or written thoughts of appreciation from veterans themselves, from families of veterans and various people. I'm sure many of you have heard far more than I, more than would have been within my earshot or sight. I think that's a tremendous compliment to Nova Scotia.

In terms of how we organized the Year of the Veteran, when I was here in the Spring I couldn't answer questions about whether we had any money. Obviously this committee, through the chairman, wrote to the government and said there should be some form of grant program. So many of the ideas, I think you'll find as we talk about them, actually came from this committee and/or individual MLAs across the province. The staff contribution to this was really twofold. I was asked to support Minister Clarke in his position as Minister responsible for the Year of the Veteran.

Through the good graces of my folks at IGA/Protocol, not the least of whom would be Norma, and Colleen from the Protocol perspective, we had folks from Transportation and Public Works, the Premier's Office, Communications Nova Scotia - who did I forget? - and the Speaker's Office, all involved in this sort of - I call it - the corner of the desk thing. The only dedicated resources we had throughout the year was Minister Clarke did have an executive assistant for the Summer period, a gentleman by the name of Kyle MacIsaac, who worked with him and, quite frankly, took the load off me, if I can be ever so blunt, in terms of he did most of the interface with individual MLAs and with communities throughout the Summer months and early into the Fall. He did just a great job for us and worked very closely with the committee and with the minister.

I'll take you through the slide show a little bit. We declared the year, everything was in support, and we worked very closely with Veterans Affairs throughout the year. Everything we did or wanted to do that had a Nova Scotia recognition feature for veterans, we wanted to make sure it was not out of step with what Veterans Affairs Canada was doing throughout the year.

I should also say that when we come to what we spent the money on, I don't have a final report yet because the year is not over. So there are still some things being sorted out and finalized. I can tell you when I appeared before you that we did not have a budget. The decision to announce Minister Clarke as the minister was made on March 5th. At that

point, while it was symbolic, there had been no discussion about how it would be, whether there would actually be money spent on this, or whether it would be an allocation of resources.

In the end we did get an approved budget, and that allowed us to do many of the things we're going to talk about. I do want you to understand that approved budget was basically what I'll call a co-operative budget in that although it was focused through Intergovernmental Affairs and the minister's office, in terms of the accounting for the spending and managing the program, it was really other colleagues and other departments that would find the money that will fund this throughout the year. You'll see that become self-evident as I go through some of this.

The highlights of the year, from our perspective, are the permanent tribute to Province House, which I'll talk about more, with the dedication of the Veterans Room, the old Cabinet Room; the grant program that each of you would have received, the \$2,500; plaques and flags, royal ensigns to every Legion in Nova Scotia and Nunavut, in that it's the Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command; the theme of the Nova Scotia Tattoo was the Year of the Veteran, and we did two things there that I'll talk about shortly; and the launch of the Year of the Veteran in the House. That sort of works from front to back, or back to front. Really, those are the highlight events.

I think, though, the most substantial events are the ones I never heard of, or we may never have heard of, and those are the ones that you folks participated in in your individual constituencies with your individual Legions, how you chose to allocate the \$2,500 that was allocated to each MLA. I've only heard sort of notional stories from those, but the ones I heard are pretty impressive in terms of what it meant to individual veterans and their families.

In terms of an events chronology, and again I want to emphasize this is but a tiny snapshot. We did have a Web site, as you know, and we did encourage people to tell us about events. It started out kind of good, but then I think everybody gets busy and not as much as we might have liked to have seen at the end of the day found its way onto the Web site. But again, from talking to individual members and community people about what went on, it's pretty impressive.

We started back on March 14th with the Victory in the Atlantic Commemoration that I actually took part in, and it found its way. I don't need to read these individually, but these were the major events throughout the year that either the minister took part or we felt we would get an additional profile for veterans. Just to give you a highlight of that, in December the Olympic Curling Trials, we didn't spend a lot of money but what we did is we brought veterans in from around the province, a small number, put them up in a hotel and got them VIP seating at the Olympic Curling Trials. Well, that got a lot of profile for veterans. They were recognized the nights they were there. So things like that.

You don't need to look at my mug, but that was where we started. You may remember the bell, the bell has been over in the Legislature. Again, it linked us with Great

Britain, the connection between Canada and Great Britain through World War I and World War II and the convoys, whether they came from Halifax, Sydney or anywhere else in Atlantic Canada. In that particular case, that was totally a retired military exercise. All we did was try to create some recognition opportunity. All of the cost, all of the volunteer person hours that went into that was all military, both from the West Coast and the East Coast because the actual bell, and then the small contribution from Nova Scotia, came from a ship from B.C. that they commissioned, retooled or reworked. There was a tremendous amount of pride in the individuals. Of course HMCS Sackville is where that emanates from.

I guess the first big event would be the resolution in the House, all Party Leaders or Leaders in the House spoke to the resolution, the Premier, Minister Clarke, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader in the House of the Liberal Party, tremendous attributes in the record of Hansard in terms of recognition of veterans and veterans' families. The reception in the Red Room with veterans, attended by Legion members, MLAs, a little bit of everybody, a great start to the program. It's also where we launched the Certificate Program. You would be aware, coordinated through the Premier's Office, where official government certificates are done in government; at the end of the year I think we're up to close to 8,000 certificates. Many of those would have found their way into your hands for distribution in your communities, signed by the Premier and by the minister.

That's the picture of many of you and the Leaders with Dr. Miller. Dr. Miller, at one time in our history, would have been the long-serving Deputy Minister of Health. He was particularly humbled to be recognized that day. Again, a very successful event.

THE CHAIR: Bob, if I may just interrupt for a moment, just to recognize the entrance and presence of Gordie Gosse, the member for Cape Breton Nova. He just finished an early morning meeting and has joined us now.

BOB FOWLER: There we are there, the Certificate of Recognition. One of our big issues of this program was the worry about duplication. There was a lot of interest from each of you and your colleagues, about making sure the certificates got to the right people. One of the things we were very diligent about was we didn't want to have two certificates going to the same person so it looked like the effort was not coordinated. My hat's off to JoAnne Fisher and the folks in the Premier's Office. They did just a great job of trying to address each of your individual concerns and responding, whether it came from a family member or anybody else. Without going to any great cost, we were able to coordinate that in a very meaningful way. As I say, 8,000 certificates, that's a lot of certificates when you think about it. Now there would be more veterans than that, but clearly, I've been in one or two homes where people have those certificates and they're darn proud of them. It's really neat to see.

We also started the Book of Remembrance. This is a lasting tribute, of course. The public was invited to sign the book. There was the odd day there was confusion there, when they thought they were signing in as a guest of Province House as opposed to a recognition of veterans, so the book does have the odd different page in it. It went to all the schools. Again, the feedback we had from the schools, from the teachers, from the principals was

just tremendous, in terms of the kids. After all, our recognition of veterans and our lasting tribute to them, it's our youth who are going to carry that on. It's the young people who have to understand the significance of things like Remembrance Day and remembering our veterans not just from the Great Wars but also our veterans of today, as well. The book was presented to veterans on November 11th. Again, a very special tribute.

[9:15 a.m.]

One of the special events we did was the Tattoo. We did two things with the Tattoo. One was we hosted the lounge one night and invited veterans to be there. They came in from different parts of the province and got to sit with the minister - Minister Clarke hosted the evening - and got to sit in the VIP section at the Tattoo. Again, we have letters from people about that. I'll just read you one as an example.

"On behalf of the Admiral Murray Br. R.C.N.A. of Pictou County I wish to thank you for the hospitality you showed us at the International Tattoo on July 6, 2005. It was greatly appreciated by all of us . . ." So this is not only from him but his family. So that's just an example of the type of letters that came in, appreciating that in the crowd of 10,000 people we were recognizing veterans. Yes, there were a very select few in the room, but they represented all veterans and got the accolades of the crowd.

The other thing we did with them in recognition, in that the theme for the Tattoo this year was the Year of the Veteran - as you would know, the province does support the Tattoo. But in addition, through the Year of the Veteran Minister, we in fact gave them an additional \$35,000 this year as a one-time grant in recognition of the Year of the Veteran. This is the program actually from the Tattoo. There was a message from Minister Clarke in that. Again, a tremendous profile for the Year of the Veteran.

The Veterans Room in the Legislature. When I talk about collaborative government, I think this is an example of where it was. There has been long-standing - as you gentlemen know from being in the Legislature, our Legislature is the most historic in Canada. Obviously over time government has been trying to bring it both up to a standard that allows it to be a functioning Legislature, but also to try to preserve the history of that great facility. What we did with Public Works, in conjunction with them and the staff of the House, is they took on the renovation of that room. I think all of you would have now had an opportunity, through your official events or through meetings you've had, to be in the room, and that room has now been dedicated as the Veterans Room, the old Cabinet Room.

Certainly all of the comments I've heard about it, in terms of just a functioning room and bringing the room while not necessarily totally back to its historic character but close to it was a tremendous lasting recognition of veterans. Of course it had an official opening on November 9th, and the ribbon-cutting and so on. That probably represents the longest lasting tribute we had to veterans through the year. I want to point out that this was part of Transportation and Public Works' ongoing building renovation plan. Government then decided to represent that. So, again, it was a co-operative effort. There's the ribbon-cutting

with the then-Speaker and then-Premier, the Lieutenant Governor and the President of the Legion. I don't know how they stand up sometimes with all those medals on. It's quite something when you see what they wear on their lapels. It's fascinating.

Then, the exhibits honouring veterans. Again, little things. Those were prints we were able to get hold of, but we had them nicely framed and they'll be a lasting representation to veterans. Those pictures represent paintings from the Army Museum, the Halifax Citadel National Historic Site, Maritime Command Museum, Stadacona, and the Shearwater Aviation Museum, 12 Wing Shearwater. Again, inclusiveness was important. We tried to be inclusive.

Veterans Affairs had the poster series with the themes: Celebrate, Honour, Thank, Remember and Teach. Those posters were, as we got them from Veterans Affairs, on display at the Legislature throughout the year. Again, that's where we did things collaboratively with them. If you recall our discussions from last Spring, the discussion was about the pins that Veterans Affairs Canada produced. We couldn't get the supply we needed. I'm sure many of you were crafty and found ways to get supplies. Certainly they weren't going to give them to us in any great volume.

In summary, the types of things we did, there was a program developed in close connection, obviously, with the Legions, where every Legion in the province got a Red Ensign, and a commemorative plaque that went with that. I'm sure many of you were at the ceremonies when those were presented to Legions. Again, a tremendous response to that, and pride. That program cost us, just so you know, about \$20,000 to purchase the flags, get the certificates done up and so on. Again, any amount of money is a large amount of money, but a small amount of money went a long way in terms of its impact.

There was a Commemorative Grant Program that we developed. The hallmark of this program was the \$2,500 that went to every MLA in the province for your decision on how you would spend that, and your colleagues would spend it, in your individual constituencies or field of endeavour. The rule that went with that was that was done, again, to keep overhead low for government and everyone else. We did it through the Speaker's Office, as you would know, you would have receipted, and as long as you, with a pretty general definition, could show it went towards a Year of the Veteran or something honouring veterans or an individual veteran or groups or whatever, it was to you to decide.

Again, that program, if fully exercised, would be \$130,000. I can't tell you exactly what number has been processed. I presumed most MLAs would do it, would in fact use the program. Through the Speaker's Office, at the end of the year, we'll get a final accounting on that so we'll know. But unless there was some small difference, I would expect that to be fully exercised.

There were then total grants in the vicinity of about \$130,000 throughout the year. Grants are everything from on New Year's Eve, just to end the year, when HRM did their year-end event on the Grand Parade, they did an extra-large fireworks show, we contributed to that fireworks show. I think it was a \$7,000 contribution. It got recognition as the

province's sort of end of year celebration. We piggybacked on their event. The minister was there. We contributed to things like that.

There were things like the Army Museum at the Citadel, there was a grant to them of \$15,000 to bolster, because of it being in the capital city and the number of people it would get through to help them with issues. The Youth Remembrance Society. There was a whole myriad of what we called provincial grants. They were just things that people asked us to do across the province that had some special significance to them. There was then about another \$60,000 of ones that came through either the allocation of \$15,000 each to the Liberal and NDP caucus offices for your dispensation, as long as it was focused on veterans, and it was probably in the vicinity of \$30,000 or \$35,000 that went through government sitting members that went out.

It would largely be to things like a stained glass window here or there - I won't speak for the two Opposition caucus offices, I'll let folks here tell us what they used their funds for - to a memorial bench to a contribution, there were two or three cases where cenotaphs were being moved because of relocation, and in one case the closure of a Legion. So we contributed to help those happen in certain communities. That's the nature of it. It was not an advertised program, it was more a response program to things that came to the minister's office.

We did have a cap on what we knew we could spend. Our total spending that we tried to stay to at the end of the day was \$330,000. We did stay within that. So if you think of the MLA grants, you think then of the program I've just talked about, about another \$130,000 in grants to various organizations and/or whatever, that gives you \$260,000 of it. So that's really where the funds went.

The other significant thing we did, in conjunction with Transportation and Public Works, was design the signs that went up at the entry points to the province recognizing the veteran licence plates. A tremendous response to that, people appreciating that in the Year of the Veteran. I will say to you those signs were designed to be temporary, they weren't put up like a typical Transportation and Public Works sign. I believe most of them are still up now, but they probably, through the Spring, will come down, at the entry points. It cost government, Transportation and Public Works, about \$15,000 to do it. It would have been probably three or four times that if we had done it on a permanent basis.

The decision was taken that if they're in good shape, they'll stay up for a while; if they're not, they'll come down. However, the ones that are in the visitor centres, if they're in good repair and they're staying, then we will keep those up as long as they truly can be seen to represent something that's first class as opposed to being in disrepair. So that was there.

We obviously did the Year of the Veteran Web site. Again, a co-operative effort. We said to Communications Nova Scotia, can you help us out, and bang, they helped us out. A lot of it was in kind. Over and above all of those things would be what Transportation

and Public Works did through their normal repair and maintenance and renovation budget to create the renovations around the old Cabinet Room, now the Veterans Room.

Pins were very popular. We probably spent between \$3,000 and \$5,000 on pins for various events. Some of you may have attended or may have been down at the big Legion event last Spring, down in Sydney Mines. There was a tremendous demand for pins. At the end of the day, it was the House of Assembly pin that we used as opposed to minting our own. We looked at minting our own pin. Number one, it would have been in competition with Canada and, number two, it was extremely expensive. So again we said, well, what do we have that would be symbolic, and we chose that pin. So at that event, I think just about everybody there got one, and then there were requests after that. It doesn't take long to spend \$3,000, \$4,000, \$5,000 on pins. But a tremendous value from them. I'm sure you know that just from folks asking you for Nova Scotia pins.

Have I forgotten anything significant? As I indicated, we did have an executive assistant on, so that cost us, as you would expect, over a six-month period, something in the vicinity of \$15,000. There were then a number of special receptions. For instance, we did the launch in the Spring, we did the November 9th, the hospitality that goes with those, and the total for the year would have been somewhere in the vicinity of \$15,000 as well.

That pretty well sums up what we spent throughout the year. I would ask, Mr. Chairman, if I might, from either your offices or that of your NDP colleagues, if you want to make any comment on how you used the funds that were allocated to your respective caucuses.

THE CHAIR: It would be a pleasure to open the floor to comments.

Mr. Christie.

PETER CHRISTIE: I do want to say, deputy, you've been somewhat modest in your interpretation of the success of the program. I think this program has been extremely successful throughout the year. I think one of the things that we will remember, and that will be remembered from this program, is the impact that it had on the youth. I do know I was just blown away when I was invited to go to the high school in my district, CP Allen High School. After having seen all the impact, what the student council decided to do was to have an art contest to decide what depicted, from that school, their feelings of the veterans. At the end of the day, they selected a drawing by a young lady, an extremely good artist. They then transferred that and made it into a mural. That stained glass mural is now resident in the lobby of CP Allen High School. It was a total cost of \$4,000. I was able to participate.

I was struck by the impact on the youth. I think as this committee and the province look at this program they should remember the impact on all of us, but I think the impact on the youth is one of the most significant things. I think that's one of the things the initiative should take a great deal of pride in.

THE CHAIR: Would anyone else like to make any comments?

Mr. Pye.

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, I want to make a comment, and I think I should make it on behalf of our Party as well, with respect to the great work that was done by Intergovernmental Affairs, the Office of Protocol and all departments within government with respect to delivering for veterans in the Year of the Veteran.

[9:30 a.m.]

I think many of us who have gone out and participated in many of the events around the Year of the Veteran certainly recognize how proud those individuals were that the Province of Nova Scotia has a committee called the Veterans Affairs Committee and that, in fact, we recognize the services that have been contributed to this province and to Canada through this port during the Second World War. We also recognize that, in fact, it was the point of entry and point of no return in some sense with respect to that. Most Canadians who were participants in the First and Second World Wars came through the Port of Halifax in order to go to another country.

I think all of that stands itself in stead and gives us the opportunity as committee members - and I'm not speaking for all committee members so I shouldn't say "us" but "me" as a committee member, particularly - that we have gone a long way in consideration to other provinces who, in fact, do not have Veterans Affairs Committees. Bob had mentioned earlier that we are still the only province that has a Veterans Affairs Committee. That, I think, speaks well of this province.

I have served for approximately eight years on the Veterans Affairs Committee and have witnessed members who, in fact, came forward here and made their presentations to this committee. I must tell you that this committee, from my eight years, has certainly supported the veterans in every step of their move for requests, and many of the requests - all of the requests, I should say, not many - were reasonable requests.

I want to also tell you that I can't give you a list of where the caucus has spent that money but I do know that our Leader in our caucus was actively involved in making sure the caucus dollars were dispensed across the province and to many of the museums across the province.

I think, Mr. Chairman, it might be wise for us as caucus members sitting on this committee to present you with a list of where we have put those dollars. I think that we can do that at the next Veterans Affairs Committee. Also, I do know that IGA - I thought you were mentioning a grocery store when you said that but it's Intergovernmental Affairs. (Laughter) I do know that Intergovernmental Affairs will, in fact, get a print from us with respect to where those dollars went.

Finally, I will say that I do not have a Legion in my constituency so I participated and shared in the Dartmouth South-Portland Valley events. As a matter of fact, my signature is on the plaque there. I do want to tell you that we do now have the Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command in the constituency of Dartmouth North, in Burnside. I do want you to know that things are moving up. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. McNeil.

STEPHEN MCNEIL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the member for Dartmouth North, I have four Legions and I think I will keep them all. (Laughter) It's amazing how they're dispersed across the province.

You know, I thought about this year as I've gone around to those Legions and talked about it. I keep coming back, quite frankly - and I've said this publicly before - that I credit the former Premier with the way this province has treated our veterans, not only in this Year of the Veteran but prior to my time coming into the Legislature, when you look at the Memorial Highway, you look at the licence plate, you look at this committee and the work that was done by this committee before I became a member, it has recognized veterans in a long-lasting way. It was a real pleasure and a great deal of pride I was able to say that we, as a province, were leading the country in that recognition.

I think it's important that we do give credit where credit is due. Often, in this game, we find fault with each other but the way in which all the Parties came together and the way that the government led the way in recognizing the Year of the Veteran is something that we should be proud of. I'm hoping the lasting impact of this will not be the signs that are in the Legion, will not be the flags that we see flying but, as the member for Bedford said, will be in our youth.

When you went to cenotaphs this year, you saw a tremendous number of young people out, celebrating not only their grandparents, but celebrating our role as a country in the way we've helped shape the world. I hope that that will be our lasting impact from all of this.

I will just speak a little bit to the funding that came to our caucus, what we did with that. We decided that each member of our caucus, 11 of us, would have \$1,000 in our riding to spend at our high schools. They would be going out to relatives of veterans as a bursary in graduation ceremonies as they take place in June.

The other \$4,000, I am very pleased to be able to say, was contributed to the National Convention of War Brides that's going to take place here in the Province of Nova Scotia. The government, and the Minister responsible for the Year of the Veteran, also matched that \$4,000, which I know they're ecstatic about. It will make a great event for them as we lead up to that. All in all, I think this event has somewhat signified what I think we were trying to accomplish and that is, feeling great about our role and the role of veterans.

I will just close off with this thought. At every event I attended, at every event that I saw government do, not only on all three Parties, the veteran was the centre of that event and that's the way it should have been. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. McNeil. I would just like to make a couple of comments on the fact that some of the areas do not have Legions. In my riding, I'm privileged to have four. What I chose to do with the \$2,500 was to cost-share an event in each Legion - that's \$650 towards the expense - and spoke at each of those four Legions at those specific events, and recognized veterans. I tell you, when you stand at the podium and you call up an elderly gentleman who has difficulty walking to the podium, and present the certificate personally, and then put the pin on his lapel, I'm telling you, it's a thrill you'll never forget.

Having done that with the money that I had for the Year of the Veteran - and I kind of gently insisted that it not be done on November 11th. I said, November 11th is a day of remembrance. Let's do that for that day. I want a specific event causing veterans to come together and that's what we did.

There again, I also have four high schools in my riding. The bursary for the students has been split and the \$1,000 is going to go as \$250 for each student in a bursary. That way the intent is to hopefully cause the youth, after the Year of the Veteran, not to end on December 31st. There seems to be an upswing in the attendance at cenotaphs in the last year or two. It died really bad for a while and now there seems to be an upswing again. With the Year of the Veteran and then carrying a bursary forward for another year at graduation in June, it's going to raise the profile again to keep it alive.

I think, with Mr. Pye's idea of a list to the province for accountability of what was done, the names of the Legions and the names of the schools, or whatever, the organizations that participated - just to give an accounting of the funds that were given by the province and to show that the accountability on all funds has been greatly appreciated and we're up front with the public's money.

Mr. Gosse, now.

GORDON GOSSE: Thank you. First of all, I would like to say thank you to Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Fowler for the Intergovernmental Affairs Department, for being there for us as MLAs and members of the steering committee. I know, myself, personally, I was probably the pest for the most pins of anybody in the province. Being from Cape Breton, I guess, I had quite a demand. I couldn't go anywhere without somebody looking for a pin, so that was good.

I do know that the \$15,000 for our caucus, I had persuaded my caucus to donate some of that money to the Cape Breton Highlanders Museum at Victoria Park. I was quite proud of that. I'm very proud of that, actually.

The whole Year of the Veteran was just an absolute thrill for myself as a person and a Member of the Legislative Assembly, to attend some of the events. I went to events for World War II, I went to events for the Korean veterans, the Cape Breton Highlanders, the Korean vets. I was really honoured, it was a privilege for me to be there as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, and to present the Red Ensign and to present the plaque on behalf of the province.

I have two Legions and I also sponsored dinners for all the veterans at both Legions. Actually I spent more than I was allotted, I spent a lot more than was allotted, really, because there were some things I wanted to do. I have a beautiful sign, actually, posted next to my office - the Year of the Veteran pin, I had painted on a sign and I still have it posted on Victoria Road in Whitney Pier. Shortly I'll take that down and donate it to Branch 128, Whitney Pier Legion. It was good because we got to hear what was going on in the Legions and spoke to what is happening within the Legion movement, within the Province of Nova Scotia, and some of their struggles and speak with their service officers and what some of their veterans are going through now.

I notice you said it cost about \$330,000, and it was money well spent. As a committee member, if there's money left over, I would like to notify the committee that this is the 80th Anniversary of the Legions in Canada. They do have a pin, the 80th Anniversary pin for the Legions. They're \$4.95 per pin. (Laughter)

THE CHAIR: And the number of pins requested, Mr. Gosse?

GORDON GOSSE: Fifty-one, maybe 52 if we have a byelection.

Again, I would say thank you to Bob, and also the young lad who has gone back to college. I can't remember his name right now.

BOB FOWLER: Kyle MacIsaac.

GORDON GOSSE: I called him a few times. He's a great young person. He has gone back to university, and I would like to give him credit, also, for being there all the time. He was a fine young person, and I hope he goes on to do good things in life because he was very professional. Again I'd like to say thank you to the former Premier, to all the Leaders of each Party for all the things they've done.

The Year of the Veteran was a great time to be an MLA and to be celebrating with all your veterans. I did manage to spend Remembrance Day with two veterans of the Italian Campaign. I spent the whole day with them, eight hours. I took them in my car, took them to their Remembrance, and took them to their special cenotaph in Sydney, for the Cape Breton Highlanders. I took those guys with me all day, so it was a pretty emotional day. There's lots of pictures, and I was very honoured to do that. I thank you.

THE CHAIR: Bob, as deputy minister, I suppose you just realized by that last - I don't know, is it a speech, is it a request, or is it a roundabout way - the sales job that was

just done by the previous speaker that an MLA is really nothing more than an elevated constituent whose hand is continually out. The requests never end. Having said that, in congratulating Colleen and Norma MacIsaac and yourself, I would imagine there were a lot of hectic things that went on behind the scenes, but with the certificates delivered in a very prompt and efficient manner and whatnot, I didn't hear any complaints of anything, just that the certificates were ordered, the certificates arrived, and then it was up to us to do the delivery or whatnot, or some of them had been mailed.

[9:45 a.m.]

All in all, from my perspective, it went very smoothly, and I didn't hear of anybody coming, as chairman of the committee, complaining, what's wrong with this or what's wrong with that. Whatever you did was well coordinated, and any frustrations that were experienced had to be behind the scenes - they weren't evident to myself, anyway. With that I would like to take the opportunity to thank you and congratulate the province, the former Premier and everyone involved. I attended several functions with Minister Clarke.

Overall, your heart couldn't help but swell with the pride that was exhibited for people who paid the ultimate sacrifice and those who were willing to put their lives on the line. As I say, sometimes when we're enjoying the life that we complain about, we don't realize how spoiled we are and how good we have it compared to other countries. With that, sir, I want to thank you for your presentation this morning and any time anything is ever relevant, we will be inviting you back, that's for sure.

BOB FOWLER: Mr. Chairman, if I might, just to conclude, thank you for the kind remarks to those of us who are in front of you, but I can assure you, for staff, Transportation and Public Works, the Premier's Office, the House itself, Communications Nova Scotia, this was a labour of love for us, too. The fact that we can sit before you and hear you folks say how well it went for you with the veterans and with their families and with your constituents, that's what makes it worthwhile. I think that's what Nova Scotia should be proud of.

Mr. McNeil spoke of the Veterans Memorial Highway, the veteran licence plate, those are things we did before. We thought of it before there was a Year of the Veteran, in recognition. Nova Scotia does have that proud history. I can say, with my Intergovernmental Affairs hat on, we also continue to do that. We have one of the largest populations of young people serving in the military today, and have paid a heavy price for that in Nova Scotia. But that doesn't go unnoticed in terms of the contribution of not only Nova Scotians but Atlantic Canadians in terms of the disproportionate per capita representation they have in the military.

I think those are part of our heritage and who we are. I think that's what made the Year of the Veteran such a huge success. For us it was fun. We were focused, as Mr. McNeil and others have said around the table, on the veteran and how do we say to them, thank you for their contribution. Colleen has a point she wants to make about a couple of things that were related to the year that I had omitted.

COLLEEN MACDONALD: Just one thing that Michael Laffin actually organized - you alluded to the Italian Conflict, Mr. Gosse - the portraits of the Ortona veterans, which Mike organized at Province House. There were a lot of veterans there from Camp Hill. That was another successful event. There wasn't a lot of room to invite a whole lot of people, because he did it in the lobby - there were committee meetings happening in the Red Chamber, so he was forced to have it in the lobby. That just tells us that the Veterans Room is very important. We could have used that had we had it at the time. I just wanted to mention that.

The other thing is to get back to the youth, which Mr. Christie mentioned. I want to mention the QE High School youth group, they were just fantastic in organizing their youth to come to all of the events, as well as the cadets. The large event, the opening of the Veterans Room, the cadets were there. One of them had a little mishap, but they were there and they were so proud to be there. It started a relationship with our office that I'm very proud of. We also had them at the swearing-in of the government. They helped us seat people and so on. They want to continue to do that. So it opened the door for some young people who are involved with the military. I really thought that was an important thing to mention.

Thank you very much. It was an honour to serve on this committee. I was very honoured to do so.

BOB FOWLER: As I sit here, Mr. Chairman, I just keep thinking of more and more things that I remember that happened that weren't necessarily part of official things that happen. You would all know, if you're a hockey fan at all, minor hockey, the hockey patches. Well, Tim Hortons was one of the largest corporate sponsors, there were a number of corporate sponsors, but we played a little piece in that, too. Again, with the focus on the veterans. I've been in the rink and I've heard veterans talk about that patch.

So the contribution of so many people. I do thank the members for recognizing former Premier Hamm, because I can tell you when he asked me to take this on, I was honoured. I can remember his words to me were, let's do this right and remember who we're honouring. But the leadership comes from all of you from the events. I could sit here all day and listen to your stories about events you were at in your communities. That's really what it's all about. That's where we got the people out in the biggest numbers. So, again, thank you, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the comments of all members.

THE CHAIR: We'll pause for a moment. We have a little bit of committee business. We'll pause to give our witnesses a chance to leave. There's a letter that Bill Langille has that he would like to present to us.

[9:50 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[9:53 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: I would like to bring to your attention a letter that was brought here this morning. Cecil O'Donnell brought it on behalf of Bill Langille. I will just read it quickly. It starts off: "Good Morning Margaret: There is a Veterans Affairs Committee meeting next week I believe. Would you make sure Bill . . .", meaning Bill Langille, ". . . takes this letter to the meeting to have someone write to Federal Veterans Affairs for this person."

"Dear Bill,

I have trouble trying to understand the reasoning behind the refusal of VAC to cover the funding for the needs of the 'VERY FEW' veterans remaining in our country. (Personally, I believe they should be given whatever they need, in any aspect!)

At present, we have nine veterans living in our long term care facility. Two of these veterans have a dementia. They would greatly benefit, in maintaining their dignity and respect, by wearing a 'jumpsuit', which would address their personal issues.

A request for funding was refused, so thankfully, our local branch (Legion #26) came through, ONCE AGAIN!

Is it possible to look into this matter, as it is not uncommon for our veterans to be refused funding for many things.

The public are under the misunderstanding, that 'veterans can get whatever they want', and this is so far from the truth!

Although I have been involved in healthcare for almost forty years, I am constantly seeing and learning new things. One of the things I am seeing, is that indeed, our veterans are lacking in care and coverage.

I have addressed issues before with VAC, such as funding for veterans when they return from acute care, having procedures done, expecting dressings to be changed, etc, and yet waiting to see if funding is authorized - who pays for the necessary supplies 'in the meantime'????

I am far from impressed with 'the system' - who suffers? The veteran, of course!

I fail to see why funding should come from the small legion branches, who work so hard for their revenue, when there should be money available from the VAC department.

Would you be able to see if it is possible to have authorized funding for two jumpsuits each, for two of our veterans, which cost \$79.95 no tax for each suit? (the local legion is covering the cost for one suit for each)

I would appreciate hearing from you,

Sincerely,

Isobel Cream RN, Quality Manager"

As Mr. Pye stated at the last meeting, we are not a decision-making body but I would just like to ask the committee what they would like to do with this letter, or will we send it on to the federal agencies on behalf of the person writing the letter? Mr. Pye.

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, Mr. Langille brought a previous request to us for, I believe, the Chester-St. Margaret's area. I think that the only protocol we were able to fulfill at that time was to - and I believe it is consistent again this time - simply forward a letter to the appropriate federal department expressing our concern as a Committee of Veterans Affairs, although we have no authority in telling them to put the money forward, just express our concern and forward a copy of this letter, sent to the member serving on the Veterans Affairs Committee, MLA, Bill Langille, for the area.

I would so move that that's what we do for the letter.

THE CHAIR: Moved by Mr. Gosse.

DARLENE HENRY: Mr. Pye.

THE CHAIR: I'm sorry, Mr. Pye. I'll be all right. For some reason or other it's kind of hard to tell the two of you apart.

JERRY PYE: Oh, please. (Laughter)

STEPHEN MCNEIL: I would second that, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIR: Seconded by Steve McNeil. Any question on the motion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Any further business to come before us?

GORDON GOSSE: I was just wondering, Mr. Chairman, who is next on the list to come before us? With the new Veterans Charter taking place April 1st, it would be nice if we could get somebody back in to have a look at what programs - and I think we had that before, though, but there are some issues that you do get in your office, but it would be nice, maybe, to have someone in from Veterans Affairs.

THE CHAIR: I heard an interview with a veteran, I believe, from Ontario, on CBC the other day. That gentleman was very upset at the fact that the new program that's coming in - there are qualifications for funding or for the benefits and I guess it's kind of the program that was set for present-day veterans and then the new program coming in which is modernized for people who are presently in the service. He was adamantly opposed to the new program in its qualifications and whatnot, stating the fact that a veteran is a veteran and why would they change - and I suppose, maybe, an update would be in order, and maybe that is something that we could look at. Yes, Mr. Wilson.

DAVID WILSON : Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm wondering if, maybe, we should send off correspondence to Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command, to lead, asking if they have any concerns about the implementation of this program on the date. That way, if they do, then we may have some questions for the representative from Veterans Affairs. So if they do have concerns, maybe we could set a meeting up with them so that they could come to this committee, voice their opinion or their concerns and then, maybe, we could have Veterans Affairs come in. We might have some more questions for them and more information on exactly what the Legion, for example, might have concerns with.

THE CHAIR: Is it agreed by the committee to do that, so that we would invite Nunavut Command first to address any concerns that - because of the new legislation that's coming forth?

[10:00 a.m.]

DAVID WILSON: Well, we can send them off a letter asking if they have any concerns. I mean, just to have them in if they don't have any would be a waste of their time, I think, and ours. So maybe a letter to the president, wondering if they do have concerns and if they could get back to us in a timely manner so that we could schedule a meeting with them, if needed. Maybe we could just e-mail everybody or get hold of everybody for the next meeting.

THE CHAIR: All right. That's what we'll do. The date of our next meeting - should we hold off and see, before we set the date for the next meeting, or should we set - I think we have it already set, don't we, for April something or other?

DARLENE HENRY: Well, we can go to April 13th.

JERRY PYE: Do we have a witness designated for that?

DARLENE HENRY: If the Legion can make it, it would be that day and/or Veterans Affairs Canada.

JERRY PYE: Okay. Mr. Chairman, if I may, since this is a hot issue and it needs to be looked at now before implementation, I think it might be wise, as my colleague had said, just to simply send a letter forward to Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command with respect

to any concerns but make sure that Veterans Affairs is able to attend or appear on April 13th.

THE CHAIR: I would agree with that, April 13th. So we'll have a choice of having both here or one anyway.

JERRY PYE: Absolutely. Anyone can come at any time and be a witness to these meetings.

THE CHAIR: Okay. All agreed? Anything further? Mr. Gosse.

GORDON GOSSE: Yes, I was just wondering about committee members forwarding letters to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I do have issues that come in through my office. I have one that is presently ongoing right now with a veteran and refusal of medication. Now, a certain medication they'll cover - they want you to know - on the back of their cards. The numbers are 1 to 10, if they have a (b) coverage that doesn't cover certain medications, you know, those type of things.

As an MLA and member of the committee, should I forward some of the letters or some of the things that I send off to Veterans Affairs, or just do it on your own as an MLA? I mean, am I looking for the backing of the committee to help toward getting this medication for this veteran who was 17 years old when he was in Germany? You know what I mean? Those types of things - he doesn't get the VIP program, has never applied for it, he's 80 years of age. Do you do those things or do we ourselves in our own constituency offices?

THE CHAIR: What is the wish of the committee?

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, I expressed concern about this when the first one came forward, if you will recall. I think that some of those comments might be in the Hansard of that meeting. I expressed concern that we might be bringing forward or causing a train of letters coming forward to this committee in which we become a committee to send letters off on behalf of veterans across the province. That was not historically what we were doing. We were certainly getting the information and passing it on through the members on this committee and to other colleagues.

I think the precedent has been set now and I don't know, quite frankly, how you escape it, simply because if the request comes forward that we, as a committee, send forward to Veterans Affairs on behalf of one veteran, then I think we are obligated and committed to send letters forward on behalf of other veterans whose letters are presented before this committee. That's all I would say, is that it's tough and if someone can offer a better direction and be more succinct about what I think, but I don't want to say openly, is fine with me.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Theriault and then Mr. McNeil.

HAROLD THERIAULT: I believe we should bring all of our concerns of our veterans here to this table. By doing so, we will know how widespread that is, whatever issue it may be. If we bring it all here, we'll all know. I mean, maybe there's something going on in all the ridings that some of us may not know about but if it's all brought here, then maybe as a committee we could deal with it better and have better impact with the federal government, that's for sure.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Theriault. Mr. McNeil.

STEPHEN MCNEIL: I think I agree with everybody. We have set a precedent though and that is somewhat of a problem. But I do have some concern with each of us bringing stuff from our constituency office, that is written to us. Maybe we should begin to look at a little bit of a protocol around this. It's not too late to change this and maybe what it should be is that if someone writes directly to you as the chairman, or this committee, then we respond to that. If someone writes to me as an MLA, then that's my job and responsibility to do the paperwork.

I think it's also my responsibility to bring it here as part of the discussion but I don't know if I should offload what would be my job as an MLA on to you, as chairman, or to the staff of this committee. I think we should look at that. If somebody writes directly to you, as chairman, then, yes, as a committee we deal with that. But if someone writes to me as an MLA, then I deal with that out of my constituency office and, of course, bring it here to make sure everybody is well aware of the situation and see if it's widespread. I think we should put a little protocol around this.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Wilson.

DAVID WILSON: We can't change what we've done in the past but I think for further future letters or requests, that we ensure that the member who is bringing it forward has exhausted all their avenues on either getting hold of Veterans Affairs Canada or whoever may be at the centre or may be able to help in the situation. As long as the member can tell us that they've done that, then I think we should be more than happy to look at that request. Just to bring every piece of correspondence we get to the committee, I think wouldn't serve a great purpose. I think if members exhausted their avenue and haven't been able to get an answer or satisfaction, in this case, then they're more than welcome, I think, to bring it to the committee.

THE CHAIR: I've listened to everyone's concerns and my own personal feeling is the fact that if historically that hasn't been done, then it's time, maybe, that we change a little and become open, and be an advocate for Veterans Affairs. But I think the educated members on the committee - we are going to be questioned. I will use myself for an example. If I bring a letter forward, I don't think any of you gentlemen are going to sit there and allow it to go forward unless you question me on, as Mr. McNeil said, what have you done as an MLA, who have you contacted and what were the responses?

Finally, as an MLA if I have exhausted - which is kind of repetitive of what everybody is agreeing to - my avenues, maybe a letter from this committee would add that extra little bit of political weight. Bringing it forward here with the media present would allow these things to become public and that would add some more clout to the committee's request to resolve things on behalf of the veterans. I think it would be helpful if we brought things forward.

Mr. Pye.

JERRY PYE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As part of the protocol, I would suggest that if a letter comes before the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, that it has documented the consultation that has taken place - the MLA, the MP and Veterans Affairs - so that we see that we're not duplicating or carrying on an additional service. Remember that the VIP program is a federal program in which the representatives of the Legislature are made very much aware of and packages are sent to. So it's not as though we're in a vacuum or in a single silo of not knowing what's going on around us. We do know.

The only thing that I'm concerned about - and I will say it now after hearing some of my colleagues - with respect to having letters sent forward, is not to act on behalf, or be an advocate on behalf of veterans, but the work that it generates for you, Mr. Chairman, and for the staff. Because if, in fact, we find that we're going to loosen up, you can be assured that one or two letters a month may not be what's going to come through this Veterans Affairs Committee. It might be 10, 15, 20 or 30, depending on what the issues might be. If they're precedent-setting issues, then surely we have a right, as a committee, to speak on those. If they're not precedent-setting issues but they're everyday medical issues or concerns that are covered through a program or not covered, with specific reasons why, then that's going to take a whole lot of our time.

That's all I have to say, is that I agree with my colleague, MLA McNeil, that there needs to be some protocol around this, rationalization of protocol around this.

THE CHAIR: Having said that, like I say - we're becoming repetitive - and I think none of us are going to allow anything to go forward that hasn't been deeply dug into.

Mr. Theriault.

HAROLD THERIAULT: This letter we have here in front of us, I've never heard tell of this problem in my area. I mean, shouldn't we just request that the Department of Veterans Affairs look into this to see how widespread this jumpsuit need is? I mean, I don't believe we should go fight on the behalf of one person, this whole committee, no, but I believe we should request that the department look into seeing how big a need this jumpsuit is, or whatever issue that comes along. We don't know, I don't know. Do any of you fellows have any problems with jumpsuits for veterans?

JERRY PYE: That's the first I've heard of it. (Interruptions)

HAROLD THERIAULT: Let's ask Veterans Affairs to look into this. I believe that's what we need to do, in any issue that comes along. That's what Veterans Affairs is for, and that's what we're for, to bring issues up to Veterans Affairs. One little request, no, we can't handle it - we may get thousands in here - but at least we can do what we should do, ask Veterans Affairs to investigate this jumpsuit. We have one right here today to deal with. How widespread is it, how far does this go?

THE CHAIR: So what do we do with this letter that we have here today?

STEPHEN MCNEIL: We deal with this letter, Mr. Chairman. I do think we need to set up some protocol around that for the future. It would be much better if this had showed up with the letter from the MLA who had already tried to attempt to solve this problem in his office, and the MP. Then we could have dealt with it after that. Initially, that's our job as MLAs individually, to go out and try to fight that individual constituent's case. As we said earlier, maybe over the next month, before our next meeting, each of us could forward to you some ideas around that. Maybe you could bring those collectively together and say this is what we've come up with as a protocol, what do you think, and we vote on it at the next meeting.

THE CHAIR: If there's nothing further to come before the meeting, then we'll stand adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:13 a.m.]